Dear Hope of Survivors Family,

It's a new year already! I don't know about you, but 2011 brought many challenges to me, personally, as well as to The Hope of Survivors. It also brought many blessings, for which I am deeply grateful.

As I write this, I am looking out the window of our new location in Omaha at the snow-covered trees and ground. Snow is a blessing to me. Its pure white color reminds me of Jesus' pure white robe of righteousness. I want to be covered by His robe; I want to be pure, spotless and undefiled. I am sure you do too! So, with a new year, snow on the ground, and hopes and dreams for The Hope of Survivors, I am looking forward to a new start and new blessings, by God's grace.

One new thing for this year is a feature article that will be included in the newsletter from now on. It is called In the Spotlight! and it is a way of featuring a different denomination each quarter and what their policies and procedures are for handling clergy sexual abuse cases. I hope you will find this information helpful—if not for you personally, than perhaps for someone you know.

With all the changes that have recently taken place in mine and Steve's lives and in the organization of The Hope of Survivors, I am reminded of the verse in Ecclesiastes 3:1, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven..." Truly, God does have a time and purpose for everything. This new year holds great promise—not only for us and The Hope of Survivors, but for you and your healing journey.

May the Lord bless you abundantly!
Samantha Nelson
Vice President & CEO

---

10 Myths About Clergy Sexual Misconduct
By Darryl W. Stephens

MYTH 1—It is just an affair. To call it an "affair" is to focus only on the
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.

Musical Misconduct
By Sheila To borrow a phrase from Dickens, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times". And right now, it was the worst. Straining to hear my voice amid drums, guitar, bass and distorted speakers on stage, I could feel the panic rising up in my chest. It was only my second time singing in front of our 500-member congregation, and to say I was out of my element was putting it mildly. Frankly, I was terrified. Read more...

In the Spotlight!
United Methodist Church

Does the organization have a clergy sexual abuse policy in place? If yes, where can this policy be found (provide URL, mailing address if a copy must be requested, etc.)? Yes, The United Methodist Church has a policy against sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships: "Anyone who works or volunteers under the authority or auspices of the Church must be held to the highest standards of behavior, free of sexual misconduct in any form." Read more...

CCEF Conference Update
From October 20-23, 2011, Karen (another volunteer) and I were in Louisville, KY, representing The Hope of Survivors at the National CCEF (Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation) Convention. Over 1,200 counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and pastoral team advisors took part in the three-day conference. In talking and sharing with the participants, many expressed the need for a ministry such as The Hope of Survivors. We were privileged to hear many share their own personal stories of abuse and to thank us for raising awareness on this issue. It was evident by the professionals we talked to, the need for this ministry is great and support in this area is woefully lacking. The conference provided an excellent opportunity to reach those helping those in need.

Sandy Kirkham
THOS volunteer

Testimonials
"The Hope of Survivors was there for me in a profound way. Their personal interaction assisted me significantly. Much healing has occurred in my life and I know I could give THOS much credit in just the fact of helping me know I wasn't alone, along with understanding the abuse of power. It was tremendously important to my healing. THOS is doing an amazing work!" -- WA

"Amen. Spiritual abuse is unconscionable and more people need to understand that when a pastor seeks out a vulnerable woman in his congregation to exploit... it is not an 'affair' at all, because of the trust issue and the imbalance of power between them. If this has happened to you, I offer healing songs on my channel, and I may not have ever been able to play piano or sing again had it not been for The Hope of Survivors." -- Comment on HopeSurvivors YouTube Channel

"I found The Hope of Survivors website after searching the net. I thought I was in the wrong but THOS showed me that I was a victim and that I wasn't alone and that, with help and support, I could be healed of the suffering. THOS is there to support, encourage and help people to heal and provides such a wonderful service. THOS is showing the world what is happening and showing the way to help deal with the issue, it's not afraid to stand up and be counted and offer help and support to people who have been abused, people who are shunned by churches and families who don't understand or..." -- WA
August 2012
Check the calendar frequently for new events being added for Clergy Sexual Abuse Awareness & Prevention Month!

August 8-11, 2012
Cincinnati, OH
ASI International Convention
Duke Energy Convention Center
525 Elm Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202
The Hope of Survivors may be exhibiting at this convention Wednesday-Saturday. All are welcome to attend and stop by the booth to visit. We look forward to seeing you there!

Hope & Healing victim’s conferences are currently being considered in various locations (i.e., Long Island, NY; Jacksonville, FL; Denver, CO; Oklahoma City, OK; etc.) and will be scheduled when funds become available to conduct such programs.

To schedule or sponsor a conference in your area, call (866) 260-8958. Check our website for additional details and the most current information.

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.

* 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 don't want to deal with such issues. It provides a service that is very much needed and very much wanted by the people who use the service and have been healed and are being healed. It's a blessing to have such a service and to have such commitment from its founders and all its staff volunteers.”--Comment on Great Nonprofits website

Read more testimonials...

Creative Ways to Help!

NEW! The Hope of Survivors has been added to IBM’s list of charities that U.S. employees and retirees can chose from during annual Employee/Retiree Charitable Contribution Campaigns. Employees have several contribution options-automatic deductions from every paycheck, onetime payroll deductions, IBM stock contributions, or a pledge to write their own check to the charity. If you work for IBM, please consider supporting The Hope of Survivors through IBM’s ECCC campaign. Thank you!

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!

To Your Health!

Experiencing clergy sexual abuse is often very detrimental to good health in several ways. For this reason, The Hope of Survivors likes to periodically provide helpful information about physical health in hopes that, as your physical health improves, so will your spiritual and emotional health. Read more...

Resources

Understanding Sexual Misconduct Among Spiritual Leaders

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

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!

Make sure to check out the other products available too!

---

This email was sent to ahc@andrews.edu by help@thehopeofsurvivors.com | Update Profile/Email Address | Instant removal with SafeUnsubscribe™ | Privacy Policy.

The Hope of Survivors | P.O. Box 16 | Thompsonville | IL | 62890

Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
10 Myths About Clergy Sexual Abuse—Darryl W. Stephens

(From the January 2012 edition of HopeSpeak)

MYTH 1—It is just an affair. To call it an “affair” is to focus only on the sexual relationship; but the real issues are the clergyperson’s violations of the sacred trust of ministries, breach of fiduciary responsibility, violation of professional boundaries, and abuse of power.

MYTH 2—They’re consenting adults, so they’re both to blame. When there is a significant imbalance of power in a relationship (as there is between a pastor and a parishioner), it is the pastor’s responsibility to maintain appropriate professional boundaries. Blaming the victim is an attempt to avoid confronting the perpetrator.

MYTH 3—A sexual relationship involving pastors is their own personal business. Even if both parties are single, a sexual relationship between a pastor and a parishioner affects the entire congregation, and makes it more difficult for the pastor to be a minister to the whole congregation.

MYTH 4—When a parishioner accuses the pastor of misconduct, it’s best to them them work it out. Clergy sexual misconduct is a chargeable offense according to the laws of the United Methodist Church, and it is even a criminal offense in some states. It is the responsibility of the church—not the alleged victim—to enforce church law and to hold clergy accountable.

MYTH 5—The pastor resigned—case closed. Closing a case prior to adjudication abrogates justice for all parties. Facts may never be investigated, innocence or guilt may never be determined, the truth may never be told. Even if the pastor resigns, it is best to complete the investigation and adjudication process.

MYTH 6—A scandal like this will destroy us; secrecy protects the church. Failure to disclose appropriate information to a congregation regarding an allegation of misconduct—and the outcome of the just-resolution process—only fuels rumors and misinformation, and denies the healing power of truth-telling. Appropriate disclosure does not mean spilling all the facts, but it does mean informing people to the extent that they have a need to know about their pastoral leadership.

MYTH 7—Better psychological screening will eliminate future misconduct. While psychological evaluations are important parts of the screening process for ministerial candidates, this process will not eliminate the problem of clergy misconduct in the church. Don’t we have a doctrine of sin to remind us of this?

MYTH 8—A “zero tolerance” policy will eliminate misconduct. If a conference is too quick to dismiss any clergyperson accused of any form of misconduct, a culture of secrecy may develop. Due process and the hard work of discernment about degrees of violations will contribute to justice and healing for all parties.

MYTH 9—No news is good news. A conference or church that has no reports or allegations of misconduct is not necessarily free of misconduct. In fact, effective education of clergy and laity about appropriate boundaries increases awareness of misconduct, often resulting in an increase in misconduct cases, at least in the short term.

MYTH 10—A pastor can never be the victim. Clergy can be harassed and abused by parishioners just as anyone can be the victim of a crime. Beginning last year, every conference is now required to have a policy about how to handle complaints of lay harassment of clergy. It is still the clergyperson’s responsibility to maintain appropriate professional conduct and boundaries, however. Church should be a safe place for clergy and lay workers as well as parishioners.


Darryl W. Stephens is assistant general secretary of sexual ethics and advocacy for GCSRW.

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

by Sheila

Musical Misconduct by Sheila

To borrow a phrase from Dickens, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times”. And right now, it was the worst. Straining to hear my voice amid drums, guitar, bass and distorted speakers on stage, I could feel the panic rising up in my chest. It was only my second time singing in front of our 500-member congregation, and to say I was out of my element was putting it mildly. Frankly, I was terrified. Somehow I managed to get through the set without passing out, and with a sigh of relief, I exited the stage with the rest of the team. “Sheila, you did fine,” Don assured me, as I glanced in his direction. It was comforting for me to know that as the leader, he had such an innate sense of my insecurities, and could offer me the encouragement I needed at just the right moment. The hammering of my heart slowed and my nerves began to calm down. “I can do this,” I told myself. With God’s help, I would overcome the paralyzing fear that had kept me from singing publicly up till now.

Despite the anxiety I faced, even while just singing during practices, being a part of the worship team was extremely fulfilling to me. My close friend Diane sang on the team, and had encouraged me to try out also. Her presence helped ease my fears. In fact everyone on the team was so friendly and supportive, I felt like I’d “come home” so to speak, and now had a group of friends who loved music as much as I did.

While Diane had given me the initial “push” to try out for the team, no less a source of support was the worship leader, Don. A tall, balding man, in his late 50s with a bit of a paunch, Don was a long time musician who’d had a top 40 hit in the early 60s. Although I was very intimidated by him, this was somewhat offset by his ability to demonstrate how much he believed in his team, including me. Knowing he had faith in me made it much easier to take the scary step of singing in front of people.

As much as I loved being on the team, I was a bit uncertain of how to relate to the others, particularly the guys. For 15 years prior to this, I’d been a homeschooling mom of four, and had very little interaction with men during that time. There was a sense of familiarity among the group members that I was not used to. During one practice, I was taken aback when two female vocalists began giving shoulder massages to a couple of the male band members. I was shocked but said nothing. When I later talked with some of the women on the team, questioning whether it was appropriate for me to practice alone with Don, I felt embarrassed when one of them gently mocked my conservative views, saying there was nothing wrong with two members practicing together. I began to think that perhaps my ideas of what was appropriate between the men and women were a bit too legalistic.

As the months went on, my attachment to the group deepened, and our Thursday night practices soon became the highlight of my week. My husband, Mike, began to act as our sound technician, so we could do music ministry together. In the early days it was easy to keep my distance from Don, especially since he seemed to treat Diane as his “favorite”, which was fine by me. I was surprised when she mentioned how often he called her at home, and that they sometimes talked for an hour or more.

After about ten months, Diane had to leave the team when she and her family moved out of state. It was at this point that Don’s attitude toward me took a dramatic shift, as if I’d been suddenly “zeroed in on”. He began to give me extravagant compliments about my singing ability, and fawned over me, making it sound like I had great potential as a vocalist. With Pamela, the other lead vocalist, he seemed cool and distant, almost cruel at times in some of the comments he made to her. In contrast, he gave me extra attention, telling me how much talent I had, and how he wanted to help me develop my special musical gift. Although I felt badly for her, I loved the feeling that someone I looked up to and cared about saw my potential. A friend of mine remarked at the time, “You are the apple of his eye these days”, and I couldn’t deny that it
seemed to be true. My dad had been a singer, even appearing on the Ed Sullivan show in the 50s. He’d died when I was four, and the way Don encouraged and admired my singing made me think of how my dad might have taken pride in me had he lived.

As I began to trust Don more and more, I let down my defenses. It initially made me feel uncomfortable when he called me at home, but over time I got used to it. He always had some “important” reason to call, but the calls became longer and more frequent, and often times the subject matter seemed a bit too personal. Mike and I discussed how “eccentric” Don seemed, but we just chalked it up as part of his unique personality. At times I’d drop by his office to check in on him, or to ask about his weekly plans for our worship team, but I always felt a bit uneasy about this. One time in particular, when I stopped by to pick up a demo of a new song we’d been working on, it took him forever to find it. In the middle of searching for it, he stopped and began an impromptu practice session with me that lasted over an hour and a half. The Senior Pastor finally stopped by and said, “What is this, a practice and no one else showed up?” I was mortified, but Don just grinned. Later on, when I asked the Senior Pastor if my being there had been inappropriate, he just brushed aside my concerns and said it was nothing to worry about.

As the months went by, I relished my role as a “musical daughter/student” of Don’s, pushing aside the feeling that it really wasn’t right for me to have a special role that the other women on the team didn’t have. But once again and out of the blue, Don’s demeanor towards me changed dramatically. He became almost indifferent towards me and now started to show more favoritism towards Pamela. As he chatted with her, talking excitedly about when she might be available for a one on one practice, I noticed him glance over in my direction. It was at that point when I began to realize that flattery and manipulation were the tools Don used to “get” what he wanted musically out of the lead vocalists. A few weeks later, during a meeting with Don and another team member, I confronted Don about his use of excessive flattery, and asked that he be more temperate in his compliments and more impartial with the women on the team. He acted befuddled as to why I would question his behavior, saying that in his mind, flattery was the process of making something “flat or smooth” so it was easy for someone to do. I wasn’t quite sure what he meant by this, but since confronting our worship leader was so stressful and scary for me, I responded by breaking down in tears.

After our meeting, Don did temporarily tone down his flattery and favoritism, and I became even more committed to the ministry. He had a vision of our team making a CD and becoming prominent in the Christian music scene, and I excitedly began to share his dream. To help move us towards this goal, I eagerly practiced and followed his coaching, as I knew I still had far to go in honing my vocal skills to a professional level. In the process I became more dependent on him than ever, and as time went on he once again began making me the object of his favoritism. I was so confused at this point, and didn’t know if his attention was of a fatherly nature, or whether I was being pursued romantically, as he seemed to switch between both types of affection. But by now I was aware of how capricious his behavior was, and I didn’t want to do anything to jeopardize our relationship again. Consequently, when Don began to request things of me that made no sense, I usually cooperated without much question.

One such time happened after I’d told him I wanted to take voice lessons to help me gain more confidence in singing, sensing my dependence on him as my musical mentor was becoming unhealthy. He usually discouraged my attempts at pulling away from him, but on this occasion he said, in somewhat of a mysterious tone, “I want to ask you to do something, but I don’t want you to ask me why I am asking you.” He continued with, “If you do take voice lessons, will you promise me to not take them from a man?” I responded by saying that Mike would probably prefer I take them from a woman anyway. This odd request was typical of Don’s behavior toward me, and although I didn’t say it, deep down I felt that Don had no right to ask that of me. When we were with the rest of the team, he’d act completely normal, but privately, I felt he was cultivating a completely different relationship with me.

It was at some point not long after his question about not having a man give me voice lessons that he began confiding “secrets” to me. Some of his secrets seemed bizarre, for example he shared with me that he took notes after each practice as to what kind of social interactions had happened among team members. He relayed private details of past church “drama” involving leadership, and it was always understood that I would share these stories with no one, not even Mike. I felt honored and flattered that he would confide in me, but also uneasy about the direction our relationship seemed to be going. I rationalized this by reasoning that musicians were just passionate people who felt strongly about things, a line Don had repeated to me many times.

Don’s fatherly encouragement toward me also began to change, which I especially became aware of this after our worship team performed at another church in the area. He told me I had done a great job on a particularly difficult song, and as we hugged good-bye, he whispered in my ear, “I love you”. I deliberately interpreted it as a brotherly kind of love, and responded
with, “I love you, too, Don”. And I did love him—I was so grateful for his help and support, but as I walked away, I wasn’t sure what he’d meant toward me. Later, while we were alone in his office, he revisited the subject by saying, “You know, what I said the other night...that was ok to say, don’t you think?”

Although we used to have full band practices every Thursday night, over time Don changed it so the practices were “vocals only”. This meant that not only the band members could skip the practice, but my husband could as well, as there was no need for a sound tech. One night during practice, Don asked if I could stay behind for a bit, as he wanted to discuss a new vocalist position that he would be filling soon. I agreed, though I felt uneasy knowing we’d be the only people at the church. During our private meeting, he rambled on and on about being a poet at heart before finally getting to the subject at hand 25 minutes later. From that point on I would occasionally stay after the other vocalists left, and even though I felt extremely uncomfortable in doing so, I seemed unable to draw a line with him or deny him anything he requested of me. Finally, on one of those nights, another singer, Joan, returned to the church and pointedly said that it was not right for us to be at the church alone. I agreed and had her walk me out to my car. The next week Don called me and mocked her words, “I mean, it’s not like we were meeting up later for a rendezvous or anything”.

Unbeknownst to me, that night Joan had returned to Don’s office to tell him that I was very vulnerable and that he should be careful with me. Don relayed her conversation to me later and said he had told her that it was good that I was under a worship leader who would not take advantage of that vulnerability. After he finished telling me about the conversation, he then said quietly, “It’s not that I didn’t want to. I did. I just had to ‘take it to the cross.’” He wouldn’t look at me as he spoke, and I was too stunned to even think of how to respond. So in what had become my typical passive way with him, I said nothing, and we just moved on to another topic of conversation. He revisited the subject a week or so later by telling me that he’d been thinking about me for months and that he “shouldn’t have done that”.

Shortly after that, Don acknowledged that his behavior had been inappropriate and asked my forgiveness, and for a time things improved. I desperately hoped we’d be able to move on, and in his words, “have a relationship that was honoring to our spouses and to the Lord”. But within a few months, he was back to the old behavior.

One Sunday Don was distraught, as usual, over the sound quality of the worship music. I felt so pulled over this ongoing issue because of my husband’s role as sound tech., so I gave him an encouraging hug and told him to discuss the situation with Mike. The next time we were alone, he made a comment about how I “sure gave good hugs”, and continued to bring up this point over the next several days. Uneasy about what he seemed to be implying, I finally mustered up the courage to ask him directly what he meant by saying this. He responded accusingly with, “you caressed me!” He then softened his tone and added that it was a good thing we hadn’t been alone at the previous week’s practice: “if we’d been alone, I was going to take it to the next level...and caress you.” I felt almost too stunned to know how to respond when he’d say things like this to me, as though I was living in some sort of a strange dream. But I did manage to tell him that we should just agree to not hug anymore.

By this time I was completely confused and unable to think straight. To someone outside the situation, I’m sure it would have been clear that I needed to leave the worship team. But I had been on the team for over two years, and it had become the most important thing in my life, aside from my family. To leave the team would mean leaving the dream of singing that I had finally begun to fulfill. And to be honest, after being at home for so many years, it was exciting to be out singing and doing a few “gigs” at other churches, and hear people tell me how much they loved the worship at our own church. How would I ever explain to my friends, family, or the church staff, why I was leaving?

In an effort to manage a situation that was growing more stressful by the week, I did talk with Don once more, telling him that things would have to change or I would need to leave the team. After that talk, he seemed to become even more brazen and deliberately inappropriate with his comments, even in front of others—as if daring me to take a stand—which I did not. It felt like I was standing on train tracks, watching the speeding train approach, and waiting for someone to intervene.

Then miraculously, that is exactly what happened. Other team members began to voice their concern and the issue was eventually brought to the attention of the church leadership. As the matter began to be investigated, Don talked with me about his “notes”, implying that he had kept records of everything, and hinted that he might have to show them to the pastor, which I took as a subtle threat. He also asked me point blank who knew about “us”. When I named a few friends I had confided in, he looked me straight in the eye and said as if he were warning me, “But only two people know the whole story.” Despite these intimidation tactics, within a month, Don was forced to resign and left the church. I felt deeply responsible and blamed myself for his having to leave. But at the same time, I felt a huge sense of relief that this situation, having spun wildly out of control, had finally been dealt with.
The senior pastor met with Mike and I after Don left, and acknowledged to us his awareness about Don’s aggressive type of seduction toward me. To this day, I am grateful that he recognized the truth of the situation. At that time I defended Don as not meaning any harm, and the pastor brought up “Stockholm Syndrome”, the term used to describe a phenomenon where hostages express empathy and have positive feelings towards their captors and defend them. This made no sense to me then, but I have since come to realize that this is exactly what happened. Somehow, I’d been emotionally and spiritually “held hostage” by Don, as he manipulated and attempted to seduce me.

To my puzzlement, the pastor did not want to hear from me what had happened. The decision to fire Don was made without any input from me whatsoever. This has left me to wonder if Don had done this previously, and just what else was known about his behavior before he came into contact with me. I was almost immediately placed on a new worship team, and told to “get back on the horse”. It was also implied that I was not to discuss this as they were concerned for my “reputation.” However, to this I could not comply, as I could not simply bury this in my mind and move on, so I stepped down from the new team and eventually left the church.

There is so much about my experience with Don, and his power over me, that can’t easily be put into words. It was almost like I was in a “cult” consisting only of him and me; the control he had over me is unbelievable, as I look back on it now. Don never took public responsibility for his behavior, and I was left to sort through it on my own. I went to professional counseling and learned that what had occurred had a name—pastoral sexual misconduct. Still I found it difficult to move on. I minimized what had happened because there had been no physical contact between Don and me, and I continued to be subtly pressured by my new church to not ever bring up what had happened. Searching online, I learned about The Hope of Survivors and when I found out they were doing a conference in my area I made plans to attend. Attending the conference was an important first step in healing, although it was not easy. While attending and listening to other victims relate their experiences, at times it was all I could do not to run out of the room—the reality of what Don had done finally began to sink in. But attending the conference was key for me in breaking my silence and in acknowledging the victimization I had experienced. And the support of Samantha, Steve, and the other participants gave me hope that there were people out there who understood. I have since had further counseling and am now at a church where there is not pressure to put up a “front” of perfection.

Through it all, I can truly say that God has used this for good in my life as well. I used to be an extremely “black and white” person, being very judgmental at times. Now I have a new sense of compassion toward others that I never had before. And I’ve also realized that my “submissive” attitude towards church leaders was really a passivity, and that is part of what allowed me to be an easy target for predatory men such as Don. I’ve also learned to recognize that I am responsible for the choices I make in life, and I no longer wait for someone else to make decisions for me, or allow them to pressure me into changing my views.

As it says in the book of Romans, we all fall short of the glory of God—and that applies to me as well as Don. Although he misused his position of authority with me, I have a feeling that if I knew his past completely, the way God does, I would have a great deal of compassion for him and might even understand how he felt unable to resist the temptation he faced. Even though I still struggle at times, with anger and grief over my experience, I can now honestly say I want God’s best for him, and that I have forgiven him for the harm he caused me.

It’s my prayer and hope that through telling my story, other women will be protected from being victimized, and that church leaders become aware of the damage pastoral abuse can cause and will take the necessary steps to protect their congregations.

[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
In The Spotlight! 

(From the January 2012 edition of HopeSpeak)

Denomination: The United Methodist Church (UMC)

Does the organization have a clergy sexual abuse policy in place? If yes, where can this policy be found (provide URL, mailing address if a copy must be requested, etc.)?

Yes, The United Methodist Church has a policy against sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships: “Anyone who works or volunteers under the authority or auspices of the Church must be held to the highest standards of behavior, free of sexual misconduct in any form.” (Book of Resolutions 2008, p. 135). LINK: http://umsexualethics.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=69CNfTFzWtw%3d&tabid=7533

How/where can victims or members of the congregation find out about the policy and proper procedures for reporting abuse? Is there a specific person or office to contact?

The UMC recognizes that sexual misconduct by a minister leader is a violation of the sacred trust of the ministerial office, an abuse of power, and a breach of fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of those we serve. Clergy sexual abuse is contrary to Paul’s exhortation to build up one another as members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:24 and 12:26).

Each annual (regional) conference of the UMC is responsible for maintaining its own policies and procedures for responding to sexual abuse by ministerial leaders. Reports of sexual abuse in the UMC should be made in writing to the resident bishop. Suspected child sexual abuse should also be reported as required by state law. For a list of annual conferences and bishops, see http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.5326735/k.925D/FindABishop.htm.

Additionally, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women in the UMC assists persons in reporting abuse in the UMC: 800-523-8390. Additional information is available at www.umsexualethics.org.

Does your organization’s policy include the abuse of vulnerable adults, as well as children?

Yes, the UMC’s policies address the abuse of children and adults. For policies regarding children and youth, see the Safe Sanctuaries program guidelines: http://umsexualethics.org/LocalChurches/Safe Sanctuaries.aspx.

Submitted By and Position:

Darryl W. Stephens
Assistant General Secretary for Advocacy and Sexual Ethics
General Commission on the Status and Role of Women
The United Methodist Church
77 W. Washington Street, Suite 1009
Chicago, IL 60602
312-346-4900 Office
www.gcsrw.org
www.umsexualethics.org

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.).

“I've seen a number of websites for survivors, but yours is exceptional!”—MN

“I feel that I have come to a place of healing and peace. I have laid down my fear and pain and have taken up the hope and joy in my relationship with the Lord. Any lingering thoughts or possible future problems don't have as much power to hurt or consume my thoughts anymore. I continue to give thanks to you [Heather] and Hope of Survivors for all the help you have given helping me understand what happened and for your continuing prayers and thoughtful guidance. As you have blessed me, I will continue to bless Hope of Survivors with a monthly contribution so that you may help others out there who have suffered from clergy sexual misconduct. I will continue to keep you in my prayers and Hope of Survivors and if it is God's will try to use my experience to help others however He leads. May God's blessing be with you all.”—MD

“I was so excited to have found The Hope of Survivors' website and a way to "speak" to someone that I failed to look over the entire website. There's plenty there for me to read and so far it has all been very helpful. ...and most of what I was trying to ask or express is found on the website. Thanks so much for your time and caring.”—VA

“From a recent blog on THOS, I have written a rough version of my story at the hands of my Pastor, please find it attached. I thought mine was such a rare occurrence in the S.D.A. Church and it was only when I found THOS that I realized mine is not so unique as I had feared, unfortunately. ...I want people to be aware. Knowledge can be strength!”—Australia

“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

“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

“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 think I would be of help in translating from English to Spanish. It would be my pleasure and my honor.”—Maria [Latino Division Testimonial]

“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 like 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 change my clothes before I finished reading it. I didn’t know what The Hope of Survivors means, now I understand. I appreciated you and Steve, your whole work, when we met in Norway and now I have a lot of reasons to appreciate you more. You have a lot of power, and a great heart to help the others. I was really impressed by what I read. I want you to know that I pray for you and the other people who work for THOS. God bless you all.”—Romania

"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/our 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 overpowered 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
To Your Health!

(From the January 2012 edition of HopeSpeak)

Experiencing clergy sexual abuse is often very detrimental to good health in several ways. For this reason, The Hope of Survivors likes to periodically provide helpful information about physical health in hopes that, as your physical health improves, so will your spiritual and emotional health.

Recently, one of our board members, Dr. James Marcum, wrote a book called The Ultimate Prescription. It has an excellent, timely message on the truth and balance in medicine. We pray it will be a blessing to you in your healing process!

The book is available online through the following websites:

Tyndale House:
http://www.tyndale.com/The-Ultimate-Prescription/9781414368177

Amazon:
http://www.amazon.com/Ultimate-Prescription-Medical-Profession-Telling/dp/1414368178/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1323818171&sr=8-1

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