Dear Friends,

Hopefully you've recovered from the holidays and busyness of the new year. January is always a busy time here, as there are year-end reports and deadlines to meet. It's now time to focus on events for the rest of the year and I think you'll be pleased to hear about what is in store for you at The Hope of Survivors.

First of all, I think you will really be blessed by Dr. Martin Weber's article series, *Tell It To the Church* (part 1 & part 2). If you've ever wondered about breaking the silence about clergy sexual abuse and how to do it, these articles will help clarify the issue and give you a clear guideline. You can access those articles here.

Secondly, a date has been set for the next *Hope & Healing* Conference for victims and survivors. It will take place in Omaha, NE, on Sunday, August 26. You can learn more and register online.

Don't forget to check our Calendar page for more events and details, as we are constantly adding and updating activities.

With God's blessing and guidance and your support, 2012 will be a great year for those who reach out to The Hope of Survivors for support, hope and healing. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of others.

Blessings to you!
Samantha Nelson
Vice President & CEO
Not spam
Forget previous vote
Clergy sexual predators thrive on secrecy. They love to manipulate Christ’s call to private dialogue as the first step in confronting church problems. But they are less fond of the next three steps mandated by Matthew 18.

Consider the full text of Christ’s formula for conflict resolution (verses 15-17): “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”

We see four steps here, each intensifying accountability for offenders who persist in resisting repentance: (1) One-on-one private confrontation. If that doesn’t work, (2) involvement of one or two others. If resistance persists, (3) disclosure involving the church family. When all of that fails, (4) disfellowship from the community of faith.

Abusers obviously want to avoid any of that accountability. When evidence of their perfidy emerges and someone in the church confronts them, they usually hide behind the privacy provision of step 1. They even seize the offensive by demanding: “Why are you talking to me about this gossip? If this woman has a problem with me, let her come to me alone and we will resolve it privately, like Jesus said to do in Matthew 18.”

Such manipulation of Christ’s counsel can devastate the victim as much as the sexual abuse itself. She should never be expected to privately confront her abuser—the inherent power imbalance between clergy and parishioner bodes an unsatisfactory outcome. Far better for her to enlist a trusted person of influence—either a local lay leader or denominational official—to confront the offender on her behalf.

Last week my phone rang from someone in distress. He had become aware of clergy sexual abuse regarding a minor, so he alerted authorities. Soon friends of the abuser hammered him with condemnation for supposedly violating 1 Timothy 5:19: “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.” These enablers admonished the reporter of abuse that he had violated the privacy rights of the pastor. They conveniently overlooked the very next verse: “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.”

When a clergy predator abuses a minor, failure to report is not only spiritually derelict but illegal as well, since the law of the land mandates notifying civil authorities. And in certain jurisdictions, a clergy sexual relationship with an adult parishioner is criminal activity that needs to be reported. It then falls upon the civil authorities—ordained by God (see Romans 13:1-4)—to determine whether the accused is guilty or innocent. When the alleged immorality is not a civil crime, the church must implement the Matthew 18 accountability process that Jesus enjoined.

When privately confronted, a predator tends to deny everything. If evidence becomes too compelling to deny or ignore, he usually claims it was a consensual relationship. (The fact is that, given the inherent power imbalance, the pastor is guilty of sexual misconduct even if an adult parishioner initiates it.)

So the process must proceed to step 2, enlarging the accountability circle by one or two members. Usually the predator’s resistance persists, which necessitates the next step, involving the larger church body. Jesus commanded, “Tell it to the church.” This must be done prudently and appropriately, yet with clarity.

Without such public disclosure, rumors swirl around the church as the predator spins his own perverted account of what he did. Finally, the last resort of a desperate predator to escape discipline is manipulating the process through intimidation, false guilt or self-pity.

Even if the predator pastor is severed from employment, there can be no closure without disclosure of what he did. Otherwise the congregation is left in confusion, with many members blaming the victim for entrapping their dear pastor and destroying his ministry. Meanwhile, without public knowledge of his sin, the predator typically exports his abuse to his next pastorate and defiles other victims. One lesson learned from the pedophile epidemic among Catholic clergy is that predators usually keep repeating their abuse, so appropriate public disclosure is essential in stopping them.
Friends of the predator who resist disclosing his sin fancy themselves as being loving like Jesus, who said: “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (John 8:7). They totally miss Christ’s point—He was defending the victim, not the clergy predators who wanted to defame and destroy her!

When a predator pastor escapes disclosure, not only is the victim denied vindication but also the congregation is left in chaos and disunity. Moreover, failure to administer “tough love” even robs the offender of motivation to come clean and repent.

*Although the victim is typically a female, increasingly males are victims as well.

*Part 2 of this series will address how disciplinary process should proceed in a way that avoids further damaging the victim and congregation, while also minimizing legal peril.

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart... — Psalms 34:18
Whose responsibility is it to supervise the process of disciplining a clergy sexual predator?

In an independent congregational church, which is locally administered, a board of lay leaders must oversee discipline for clergy sexual abuse. Churches under denominational supervision have regional administrators who are responsible to deal with predators. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, local conference presidents are supposed to execute discipline upon the offending clergyman, and union presidents oversee the annulment of his ordination to prevent further abuse of parishioners.

This is not an enjoyable part of their job. It’s a lot more fun to ordain pastors than to disbar them. It’s a lot easier casting leadership vision than casting blame where it is due. To further complicate matters, often powerful or wealthy supporters of a predator pastor try to prevent the president from doing his job—or to do it so secretly that nobody knows what really happened.

Public disclosure is scary and admittedly risky. Beyond the danger of aggravating an already bad situation, there are legal perils as well if the process is not executed properly. But the reverse is also true. Keeping secrets may seem the safe thing to do, but it’s actually quite dangerous and damaging.

Catholic bishops discovered this when civil authorities put them on the witness stand, under oath. These church leaders had imagined they could keep the secrets of their pet predators in the collegial circle of religious boardrooms. Suddenly they found themselves in civil courtrooms, compelled to tell the truth—the whole truth. The church lost many millions of dollars in lawsuits, not only because of the predators’ misbehavior but because bishops and cardinals knew what was happening but reacted inadequately or perjured themselves in court by seeking to hide the truth.

So legal risk exists at either extreme of inappropriate disclosure or inappropriate silence. Everything must be done decently and in order when executing discipline and disclosure.

Church leaders today can learn lessons from the ancient leader Eli. When his sons committed clergy sexual abuse, he scolded them privately but refused to punish them publicly and remove them from pastoral service (see 1 Samuel 2:22-35). God condemned and replaced Eli the enabler. The same fate should befall leaders today who follow his example. In refusing to take decisive action against pastoral wolves in sheep’s clothing, these leaders are no longer shepherds but hirelings, unfit for holy office (see John 10:12-13). These cowardly administrators usually manage to keep their jobs through cronyism or other political expediencies, but ultimately they will have God to contend with.

So do all church members who enable clergy sexual abuse, either actively by openly defending the predator, or passively by simply keeping quiet when it is time to speak up. A principle of ancient Roman law is that “he who is silent is said to consent.” And in heaven’s eyes, neglecting to take action against a predator is a grave offense: “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 17:15). Silence in the face of sin is not golden but cowardly complicity.

God’s curse is upon those who pamper the predator or maintain friendship with him as if nothing had happened. God actually considers these enablers to be partners of the apostate. The Bible is clear: “Do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” (2 John 1:10-11; see also 1 Timothy 5:22). This solemn command is almost universally ignored in mainline Christianity.

We had better stop and think about that amazing fact. God condemns church members who would never themselves commit sexual abuse as guilty of that very sin if they sustain a relationship with the predator.

Not that we should stop praying for the fallen pastor and if he repents, embrace him as a brother again. Nor does it mean putting a former prodigal back in the pulpit, where he would be tempted once again to abuse pastoral powers; there are other ways he can humbly learn to serve outside of leadership.

Severance from church fellowship is step 4 of Christ’s Matthew 18 formula: “Let him be to you like a heathen” (verse 17). This is the only safeguard against perpetuating the abuse of a predator or sustaining his lies, which defame the victim and destroy the unity of the congregation.
It is also the only possible cure for enablers, who have made themselves clowns in the predator’s circus. They are partners in his perfidy by living his lie, thus becoming an abomination to the Lord.

Most enablers would never consider committing sexual abuse themselves. And once they can no longer deny what their pastor did, they usually disapprove of his behavior—but not enough to decisively deal with it. They may get sad, but they should be mad. Like the apostle Paul, who sided with vulnerable victims instead of their abusers: “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?” (2 Corinthians 11:29).

Enablers flatter themselves that they love God, the church, and the predator pastor. But failing to deal with sin is not love but a perversion of it: misplaced sympathy, dysfunctional loyalty or simply cowardice. Whatever the motivation, enablers choose to live the lie of the predator and thus will also share his punishment. Moral cowards will be lost souls outside the Holy City, partaking with the predator in the fate of the devil himself: “As for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Sad words, but this is serious: If you participate in a predator’s lies you will also participate in his punishment.

How can you know whether you are enabling a predator? By Christ’s standard in Matthew 18. When an offender refuses private admonition (step 1) and small circle intervention (step 2), then it is time to take action: “Tell it to the church” (step 3), and if that does not deter him, cut off all connection with him (step 4).

Remember, Christ’s purpose in all this is to preserve the integrity of the church, its ministry to vulnerable members and its witness to the community. And ironically, such tough love is the only hope to reclaim the soul of the predator, although he should never again be trusted with pastoral ministry and the temptation of future victimization.

*Although the victim is typically a female, increasingly males are victims as well.

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

Check this page often to find out when and where our upcoming conferences and events will be held! Or, contact us to find out about sponsoring a conference in your area! Thank you!

January 2012

1
The Hope of Survivors will be closed for the holiday. May God bless you and have a wonderful New Year!
Confirmed

8-11
Pastor Steve & Samantha will be out of the office for Pastor’s meetings.
Confirmed

16
The Hope of Survivors will be closed for the holiday.
Confirmed

February 2012

18-25
In-house session.
Confirmed

March 2012

20-21
Online Event—FACSA Foundation Virtual Expo
Mark your calendar for March 20-21, 2012 and get ready to enjoy a unique internet experience all from the comforts of your home or office computer, presented by the FACSA Foundation. The Hope of Survivors will be exhibiting at this virtual expo.
Confirmed

April 2012

19
Denver, CO—ASI Chapter Meeting
Denver Ramada
10 East 120th Ave.
Martin Weber, board chairman, will be interviewed by ASI on behalf of The Hope of Survivors during this convention. Check the schedule on the handouts when you arrive at the convention for the date and time. Visit ASI Mid-America for more information.
Confirmed

28
Hawi, HI—Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day Sermon & Seminar
Kohala Seventh-day Adventist Church
55-3361 Akoni Pule Highway
Pastor Steve Nelson will be speaking for the worship service, followed by an afternoon Trust & Truth seminar with Steve and Samantha on abuse in the church. More details to come!
Confirmed

***Please note that Steve & Samantha will be out of the office April 25 through May 6 while traveling.***

May 2012

4-5
Hawi, HI—Healing/Revival Sermon Series
Kohala Seventh-day Adventist Church
55-3361 Akoni Pule Highway
Pastor Steve Nelson will be presenting this series of messages focused on spiritual, emotional and physical healing through Christ. More details to come!
Confirmed

June 2012
17-24 Omaha, NE—The Hope of Survivors Canadian Division Training Session

**July 2012**

20-21 In-house session. Tentative

Bucharest, Romania—Travel from Omaha to Bucharest

31 Pastor Steve & Samantha will be traveling to Romania to provide further training and support for The Hope of Survivors Romanian Division.

***Please note that Steve & Samantha will be out of the office July 31 through August 15 while traveling.***

**August 2012—Clergy Sexual Abuse Awareness & Prevention Month!**

2 Bucharest, Romania

**Time:** 6:00pm

The Hope of Survivors Romanian Division Meeting with Pastor Ion Buciuman.

Bucharest, Romania—Spiritual Revival Series

Balta Alba Seventh-day Adventist Church

TICUŞ street, nr.7, Bucharest sect. 3

3-4 Bucharest, Romania

**Time:** 8:00pm Friday, August 3; 11:00am and 6:00pm Saturday, August 4

Revival series focusing on spiritual healing and having a genuine relationship with Jesus will be held at the Balta Alba Seventh-day Adventist Church. Translation will be conducted by Pastor Ion Buciuman.

12 Moieciu, Romania—Wedding

Pastor Steve will be conducting the wedding ceremony for some dear friends.

Cincinnati, OH—ASI International Convention

Duke Energy Convention Center

525 Elm Street

Cincinnati, OH 45202

8-11 **Sandy Kirkham, Shyleene Rosado** (Latino Division), Jennifer Schwirzer and Martin Weber will be exhibiting on behalf of The Hope of Survivors at this convention Wednesday-Saturday. For more information about the convention and lodging facilities, please visit the **ASI web site**. All are welcome to attend and stop by the booth to visit. We look forward to seeing you there!

Omaha, NE—Hope & Healing Conference

**Time:** 9:00am-5:00pm (Sunday)

**Location:** Hampton Inn & Suites—Omaha Downtown, 1212 Cuming Street, Omaha, NE 68102

**Cost:** There is a $50 per person non-refundable fee for the conference, which includes the cost of lunch and materials. You are responsible for your own lodging and transportation, if necessary.

**Registration deadline is July 29. Register Now!**

Speakers: Steve & Samantha Nelson, Co-Founders of The Hope of Survivors; Martin Weber, D.Min., board chairman; and Ted Vanderlaan, board member.

There is limited seating and the conference will be on a first-come, first-served basis. View and share the **flyer and press release**!

**Lodging:** Call the hotel at (402) 345-5500 to book your room at the discounted rate of $99 per night, plus tax. There is a free shuttle from the hotel to and from the airport. Call the hotel for more information.

**Note:** There are no childcare services available for this conference.

**Future Events**

TBD New York—Hope & Healing Conference for victims of Pastoral sexual abuse. **Donate now** to make this a reality! Be sure to designate **New York** on your donation.

**Tentative (based on funds)**

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