Dear Hope of Survivors Family,

Many people dream of visiting the immense tropical beauty of the Hawaiian Islands. They long to bask in the clear blue waters of immeasurable beauty and renew their hearts in the sights, sounds and cool ocean breezes. Samantha and I were recently called to this place of paradise to minister to a church that had been in crisis. It would have been a much more pleasant place to visit if the circumstances were more favorable, but yet, there is no place we would rather be than in the center of God's will.

If only somehow there was a boundary maker where abuse could not travel. How could such sinister evil be lurking in such a magnificent and glorious place? This question takes us all the way back to the original Paradise. Within the awesome grandeur of that garden of splendor evil lurked. Patiently he waited at the forbidden tree. The serpent schemed and stalked the beautiful and unsuspecting Eve. He carefully and cunningly dropped his artful deceptions into her innocent and unsuspecting mind and, before she realized the danger she was in, his trap was set. She took the bait, falling prey to a heinous deception—one leading to a life of untold misery and pain.

Clergy sexual abuse has its roots in that lie told at the tree of knowledge of good and evil thousands of years ago. It's not a new trick. The devil uses just one—the same one he has mastered through thousands of years and millions of artful practices. Yet, each time he succeeds, the results are still the same. Lives are destroyed, churches are wounded and faith in God is severely shaken. It starts with doubt and mistrust and ends with devastation. In its wake follow heartache and shame, but there is still good news amidst all this terrible destruction.

Often this level of understanding is hard for many in the faith community to firmly grasp. They see two adults and immediately think "affair." This was the issue with which some in the congregation at the church were struggling. Our first meeting with the church was a presentation of our video Call It Anything But Love!. This documentary was produced for the sole purpose of helping viewers grasp the devastation we faced and, by relating to the abuse we suffered, to be able to gain a more accurate understanding of what other victims must go through.

Over the next three days we held two additional programs which went further into this complex maze of how abuse takes place in the church setting, who is ultimately responsible for the relationship that incurs, and what steps can be taken to heal and protect the church from further devastation. We closed out the weekend with a message on God's unfailing love and how, in everything we face, God Himself suffers too.
The same God who called out to Adam and Eve during their moment of crisis still calls out to victims of abuse today. "Where are you?" He asks. "Why are you hiding from Me?" He asks. "Did the evil one remove your innocence? Do you feel exposed, humiliated and unclothed? Don't worry," He says, "I still have a marvelous plan for you. Yes, I will take your guilt upon myself. On My cross I bore your shame. You don't need to hide anymore! I have already bruised the serpent's head and you can go FREE, clothed in the garments of praise and My righteousness! I promise you joy, peace and true love, if you only come to Me."

Samantha and I returned home once again amazed at the power of God to restore and "heal the broken hearted." Our hearts have been knitted together with many precious and wonderful spiritual family members--many we would not have had the privilege to know had not God allowed us the pleasure to minister in paradise!

Thank you Father for Your amazing grace and transforming love!

Steve Nelson
President