Dear Friends,

**Getting out of clergy sexual abuse is only half the battle.**

This battle reminds me of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, and the Israelites under his power and captivity. Pharaoh refused, many times, to let his slaves go and pursued them even after he finally did agree to their freedom. "When the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!"

Pharaoh gained from the suffering of those he had enslaved and thus did not want to set them free. So too, it is with clergy in misconduct. They selfishly want to keep captive, no matter if it is killing the soul and spirit of the one in captivity. In fact, in most cases it is the parishioner that fights to get out and tells someone of the abuse. If it were up to the pastor, he would continue to keep them in it. Some clergy sexual abuse survivors, once free, are literally pursued by their former pastor and sometimes even former church members. "As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?"

Many survivors feel like they are "dying in the desert" once they are out of the abuse.
Just as in the days of the Israelites, God has heard the cries of his people. What will He do? I know what Jesus would do. He would leave the ninety-nine (case in point, that means all the church-goers) to go after the one lost. And that is literally what The Hope of Survivors does. They go after the one lost. They carry the 'one', mixed with great joy, but also a burden of care on their shoulders, to help rescue them and tend to their wounds.

However, in many cases the 'one lost' cannot go back to the rest of the fold. Many clergy abuse survivors will never enter a church building again. Once free, Moses sang a song of victory, "You will bring them in Lord... the sanctuary." (Exodus 15:17) That 'sanctuary' is no longer seen as a safe place. Many experience 'triggers' when they enter a church building. They no longer trust the church. They no longer see the church as holy or sacred, but rather as perverse and marred. I know of clergy sexual abuse survivors who have ended up suicidal, self-harm cutters, gone into mental institutions, become drug users and alcoholics, have eating disorders, are isolated recluses, have to move their residence, change their names, are left with post traumatic stress disorder, become homeless, a few have even ended up sleeping on the streets. Others have lost their marriage, loss of family, loss of friends, loss of job, loss of finances, loss of health, loss of identity, loss of self. Worst of all, some lose their faith.

Other people who experience a traumatic or devastating event in their lives can turn to the church, as we see happen after many tragic events, churches will fill up. This is not so for a clergy sexual abuse survivor. God knows and understands this. So where can they go?

Well, this is where The Hope of Survivors Renewal Center comes in. What better way for victims to get healing then to be able to talk to other survivors, to tell their side of the story, to have someone listen and understand, to find a place where twisted scripture can try to be straightened and faith in God can be restored. They will be able to receive in-person counseling. Be in a safe place to get over the physical, emotional, and spiritual shock. A quiet place for prayer. A place to be still. A place of hope. As God said to the Israelites, He still speaks today, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Exodus 14:13) Yes, God is faithful to fight our battles!
However, in order for this renewal center to run efficiently, renovations are necessary. Are you able to help in this area? Or sponsor a survivor, who would otherwise not be able to afford the costs? No amount is too small and any amount is very much appreciated. In the long run, this is not about repairing and beautifying a 'house'. It is about turning [heart] ashes into beauty. "...to bestow on them a crown of beauty, instead of ashes...to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives." (Isaiah 61)

It is about healing the broken hearted, the other half of the battle.

On behalf of clergy sexual abuse survivors everywhere, thank you.
Wendy Schwitzer
Vice President, THOS Canadian Division and Victim Support Services

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