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Adventists Say No to Violence

PEELING BACK THE LAYERS OF A COMPLICATED HISTORY

BY ALEX AAMODT

The research study offered a chance to finally see the true extent of domestic violence within Seventh-day Adventist communities, but Dr. René Drumm worried it might not happen at all. Drumm had seen domestic violence in multiple professional roles—first as a social worker running a shelter for abused women, then later as a sociologist. In 2001, Drumm and her team at Andrews University received a \$35,000 grant from the Winifred Stevens Foundation for a large-scale study to determine domestic violence rates within an Adventist population. Conventional thinking in domestic violence studies had theorized that conservative religious beliefs would make women more vulnerable to violence, but there had been little real data to test the idea. Drumm's study could be of great interest not only to Adventists but also the greater scientific community.

Yet a large study needed approval from church leadership, and there was a frightening possibility for those in charge: that the results would show a higher rate of violence in Adventists than the general United States population. The grant money came with the stipulation to work in the foundation's region of the Northwest United States,

and Drumm scheduled a meeting for the researchers to plead their case to the North Pacific Union Conference.

NPUC leaders were amicable to the purpose of the research, but they were also concerned what it could mean for the church's image. Drumm anticipated this battle, and for the day of the meeting asked to have women present in support whom the majority-male NPUC leadership trusted. It was just after Drumm finished her official presentation that one of these women leaned forward and spoke.

"This is an important thing to do," she said. "I've been there."

There was a shift in the mood of the room. Drumm heard audible gasps and sighs. "There was, in a nice way, sympathy," she remembered.

The NPUC voted yes.

Over the next several years, churches were chosen at random throughout Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Even after an official endorsement by the NPUC, only half of selected churches participated. At most that did, a family life professional made a short presentation, then asked all adults to stay after. Men were

moved to one side of the room, women to the other. Surveys were passed out with a long list of questions. In total, forty-nine churches and 1,431 individuals participated. The efforts to ensure the safety of all the participants was extensive, for if someone was being abused, their abuser might be sitting there in the same room.¹

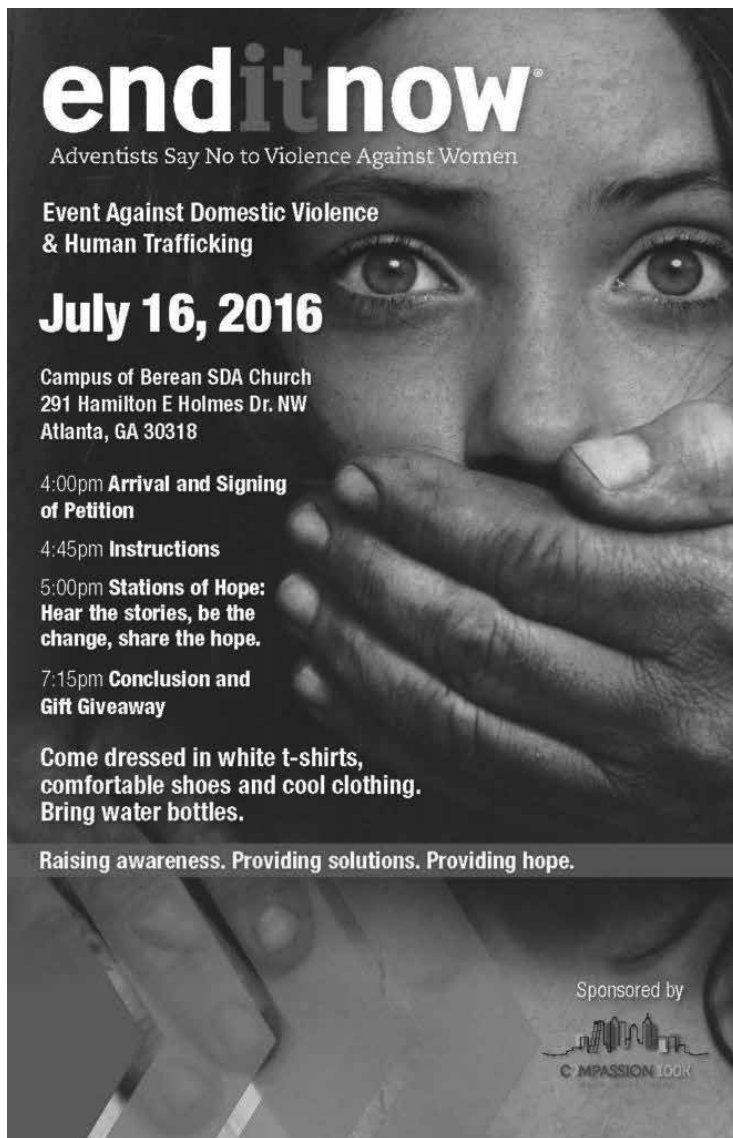
A woman sat in her pew one Sabbath and carefully read the questions on the survey. Karla was thankful her husband moved to the other side of the hushed sanctuary, but she still shielded the paper as she wrote, afraid that someone might see. For all this time, she had never told her friends at church or even her parents; she had suffered more than twenty years of abuse and had yet to tell a single soul.

There were some surprises when Drumm and her team published the data in 2006. Rates of domestic violence in the study were nearly equal to the general population of the United States. Sixty-five percent of individuals had experienced controlling or demeaning behavior by an intimate partner, 46 percent had seen common couple violence, 29 percent had been sexually victimized, and 10 percent had endured severe physical abuse. Although both men and women were victimized, women were at much higher rates.

The study was rigorous, but not without limitations, as it only looked at one region of the country; it also did not ask about the relationship of the abuser to the church.

“That was an open invitation for people who wanted to criticize [the study],” Drumm remembered, “To say the abusers are nonbelievers, and so, therefore, it doesn’t really count.”

To flesh out the data, Drumm and her colleagues fashioned a qualitative study, conducting in-depth interviews with forty women survivors. They did not have to still identify as Adventist, only to have been church members when the abuse took



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**Event Against Domestic Violence
& Human Trafficking**

July 16, 2016

**Campus of Berean SDA Church
291 Hamilton E Holmes Dr. NW
Atlanta, GA 30318**

4:00pm **Arrival and Signing
of Petition**


4:45pm **Instructions**

5:00pm **Stations of Hope:
Hear the stories, be the
change, share the hope.**

7:15pm **Conclusion and
Gift Giveaway**

**Come dressed in white t-shirts,
comfortable shoes and cool clothing.
Bring water bottles.**

Raising awareness. Providing solutions. Providing hope.

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place. Published in 2009, qualitative results dispelled attempts to minimize the first findings, for 90 percent of the women had an abuser also in the church. Some even had abusers who were church leaders.

The second study also looked at why abuse rates were not higher, as theory had originally suggested.² Those higher predictions centered around “belief-based barriers”—teachings such as the sanctity of marriage and submissive gender roles—that could contribute to violence. These belief-barriers appeared for some of the women in the study, but so did a competing phenomenon, as some reported how the church had helped them through their trauma and helped them get assistance. For some women, religion contributed to their entrapment, but for others it helped them survive.



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HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



In the face of the worry going into the research, perhaps the results allowed a sigh of relief for some church leaders. But there was also a disturbing reality to the findings, for almost certainly, millions of Adventists—most often women—were suffering from domestic violence around the world. The near decade of research by Drumm and her coauthors did not set out to create Adventist data—their work applied to faith groups more broadly—but by using Adventists as the research demographic, they created a trove of information that offered a glimpse into the complicated and turbulent reality of domestic violence within Seventh-day Adventist church membership.³ Those numbers begged the question, *what might the church do in response?*

The church had taken some steps to combat domestic violence in the past. It was a core mission when the modern General Conference Women’s Ministries department was created in 1990. The church also released official statements, one in 1995 titled “Abuse and Family Violence,” and one in 1996 titled “Family Violence,” that identified “verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, or active or passive neglect,” as examples of abuse.

At Annual Council in 2001, an abuse emphasis day was voted onto the yearly church calendar. Heather-Dawn Small had just joined Women’s Ministries when the vote took place, and she helped develop the first materials when the day was observed the following year.

“We felt that there needed to be an awareness of this issue,” Small said, “Because at that time, we still had the majority of people say, ‘This is not a church issue. This is something that’s out there in the community.’”

Small would become Director of Women’s Ministries in 2005, and she continued to promote the emphasis day, focusing on different types of abuse each year, though domestic violence was a recurring topic.

“Of course, domestic violence pops up every few years, because that’s the number one place

where we find [abuse],” Small said. Still, while recognition of the emphasis day grew, adoption throughout churches was far from universal.

“Those years, we were just doing everything we could for women to have this day,” Small said.

It is hard to say exactly when—memories tend to dim over the course of a decade—but at some point, late in 2008 or early in 2009, Charles Sandefur began to have conversations about a new type of project at the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. Sandefur had been President of ADRA since 2002, but he began to think the agency could be more effective.

“We can’t just raise money to do all these expensive projects,” Sandefur remembered of the thinking at that time. “We need to move to advocacy. You can put NGOs into two buckets: those who do advocacy, and those who are implementing NGOs. They are not mutually exclusive, but ADRA had been almost universally ... an implementing NGO.”

Not everyone at ADRA thought there should be an expansion into advocacy, but many of Sandefur’s deputies agreed with his vision; but what form should such advocacy take? One issue rose to the top as an effective synthesis of ADRA’s preexisting humanitarian projects and overarching mission: violence against women and children; stopping domestic abuse. Those were issues everyone could rally behind, Sandefur thought, and ones that aligned with so much central to Adventism.

But while ADRA had experience and resources for conducting global projects, its duty as an aid organization was to anyone in need, regardless of religious faith. ADRA could connect with the global community, but to accomplish what Sandefur and his team began to envision, ADRA would need the might of the church’s influence to mobilize Adventist members.

It was time to talk to Women’s Ministries.

Heather-Dawn Small was excited when Charles Sandefur came to her on the third floor of the General

Conference building with the prospect of a joint advocacy initiative. Although Women’s Ministries had continued to work on projects raising awareness and combating domestic violence during her seven years at the department, too often it felt like not everyone saw it as an urgent priority—from leadership all the way to the local congregations.

Sandefur found Small effusive in her eagerness to come on board, and they agreed to reach out to other departments. Soon they met with Carla Baker, NAD Women’s Ministries Director. She, too, was enthusiastic about collaborating, and as the three talked, it became clear that they all had slightly different agendas that perhaps could coalesce in a wider ranging project than first imagined. Carla Baker already had a strong interest in combating abuse perpetrated by church leaders, and she

wanted to make that part of the new project as well.

As the discussions continued, more people were brought in to start working on the details. “We had a small steering committee to help guide the campaign along.”

Julio Muñoz, then ADRA Bureau Chief for Marketing and Development, remembered. Rajmund Dabrowski, General Conference Communication Director, also began to attend meetings the group held periodically.

A banner campaign would be the first step, they decided, an awareness initiative that would push a worldwide petition. The goal would be one million signatures to take to the United Nations and present to the Secretary General—a way of making a public statement that Adventists were united as individuals, and as a church, in stopping violence against women.

Before they could start developing resources, they needed a name for the project. “To be advocacy, we said we wanted a verb,” Sandefur remembered. There was no shortage of ideas, but after several weeks, Sandefur and Muñoz brought something they thought could stick: End It Now. The other committee members liked the name, and it was refined—written lowercase to sound less strident; written as one word to be more distinctive:

enditnow: Adventists Say No to Violence
Against Women

For some women, religion contributed to their entrapment, but for others it helped them survive.

The question of funding remained. Since enditnow would be a new initiative, ADRA turned to outside sources, and the Versacare foundation awarded a \$225,000 grant specifically for the project.⁴ While the majority of ADRA's normal funds were earmarked for projects, the agency also had unassigned general funds, some of which also went toward enditnow.⁵ The committee members began planning for a launch at the 2009 Annual Council that was fast approaching, when they could present in front of church leaders from around the world.

The schedule was tight when the annual meetings began in October of that year, but the steering committee members were ready to maximize the ten minutes they were given. Muñoz and his team played a short introductory video, then Sandefur and Small took the stage, standing in front of a large enditnow banner.

"It's a global crisis, and as a church we need to be involved and be aware," Small said. They asked the present delegates to sign the banner to officially kick off the signature campaign, and General Conference President Jan Paulsen came on stage to provide the very first signature.

"I hope and I pray, and I will do my part so that this will make an impact, and that the position that we take as a people, giving the highest value to women, will become widely known and supported," Paulsen said.⁶

Division presidents, union presidents, and other delegates signed the banner. It was exactly the sort of enthusiastic launch that the enditnow committee members had hoped for.

Throughout the rest of 2009 and the beginning of 2010, ADRA and Women's Ministries promoted enditnow, providing an online petition and enditnow-branded

advertising that individuals from all over the world could use to gather signatures in their area.

"It was really a grassroots campaign, which is what we wanted," Muñoz said. "We would provide some of the resources available online so they could download forms and posters to print themselves. But it was for church members to make the campaign their own."

"We had created these kits, and they were coming from all around the world, people signing and sending them in to headquarters," Sandefur remembered. The signatures began to pile up, and the once far-off goal of one million started to appear closer.

In the meantime, Charles Sandefur was already part of a group of leaders from faith-based NGOs who met on occasion at the United Nations. At one of their meetings shortly after the launch, he explained enditnow and the thousands of signatures and worldwide participation the campaign already had received.

"They were just stunned. They had no idea that a community like Adventists had that much global reach," Sandefur remembered. "Within two hours, they had me in to see Ban-Ki Moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations. I only spent three to five minutes...but they wanted to explain [enditnow] to him, and I had some pictures of the signatures we already had."

Sandefur left the impromptu meeting excited about Ban-Ki Moon's enthusiasm. They had only just begun the path to a million signatures, but soon there would be an opportunity to continue the launch on an even larger stage—the quinquennial General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia.

The goal would be one million signatures to take to the United Nations and present to the Secretary General—a way of making a public statement that Adventists were united as individuals, and as a church, in stopping violence against women.

The 2010 session began on June 23, and ADRA's booth had large banners with the enditnow logo for visitors to sign and join the petition, and there were banners elsewhere throughout the Georgia Dome as well. Women's Ministries also promoted enditnow.

"We gave out flyers, bookmarks, cards, and all sorts of things," Heather-Dawn Small recalled.

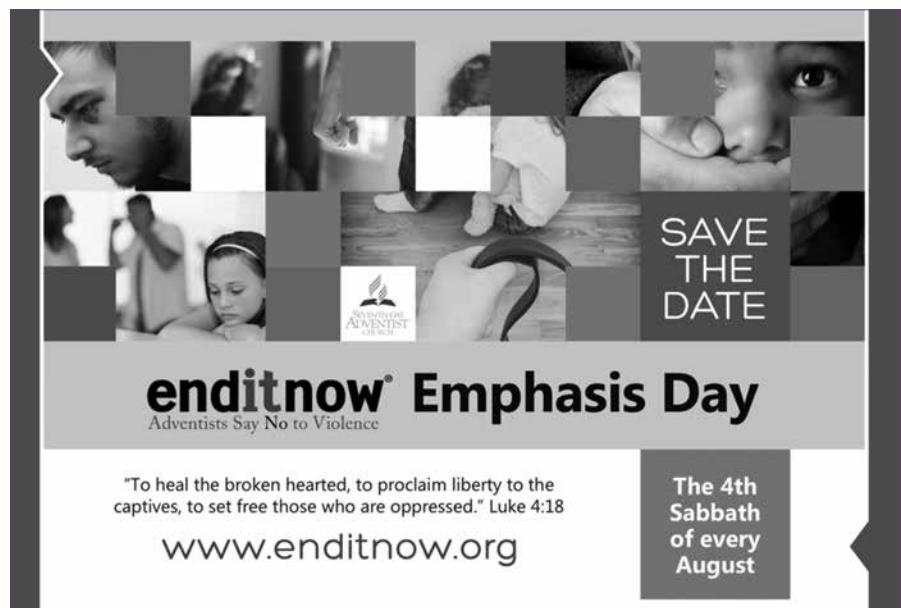
They all hoped that those attending the session would return to their home countries and churches inspired by enditnow, causing more people to join the movement. It seemed like this happened after the 2009 Annual Council, and now the exposure was even greater.

On the first Sabbath evening of the world business session, Sandefur presented enditnow on the main stage, bringing one of the large banners already covered in signatures. Ted N. C. Wilson had just been elected the new General Conference President, and he came up to prominently add his own.

For the members of the enditnow committee, this was a victory for the initiative's future. All signs pointed to the momentum continuing to build, and it appeared the new General Conference leadership would continue to be supportive. Another official statement was also voted at the start of the 2010 Session titled "Ending Violence Against Women and Girls." "[T]he Adventist Church says, 'Let's end it now,'" the statement read. Perhaps even by that winter the petition would be ready to take to the United Nations, Sandefur thought.

It was true that the 2010 General Conference Session portended changes for enditnow, but they would not be those that the committee members imagined.

Turmoil engulfed ADRA as 2010 came to a close. On October 12, Ted Wilson convened a special ADRA board meeting. Sandefur was fired, and immediately replaced by Dr. Rudi Maier. Reporting by *Spectrum* later



revealed that Maier was heard claiming Wilson offered him the job just after the GC Session in July.⁷ The abrupt change in ADRA leadership would have implications for a number of programs—including enditnow.

It soon became clear that Maier was not interested in continuing the initiative. According to a source familiar with the program and speaking on condition of anonymity, Maier was invited to attend enditnow steering committee meetings after taking over the ADRA presidency.

"I don't believe [Maier] attended the first couple of steering committees. There were financial decisions to be made, so I think he eventually went one time to the meeting, and it was uncomfortable and led to a couple of really testy exchanges," the source said.

According to another source familiar with the program and speaking on condition of anonymity, Women's Ministries approached Maier directly, meeting with him to talk about continuing enditnow.

"He said no, we're not interested in it," the source said. The partnership between ADRA and Women's Ministries was over.⁸

Rudi Maier did not respond to emails and messages asking for comment on this story.

On February 12, 2011, seventeen ADRA staff were fired under the pretense of financial restructuring—a day dubbed "Black Tuesday" at the agency. More senior staff and executives would resign in the months after.

By spring, Muñoz was left as the main proponent for enditnow at ADRA, and for a time he tried to continue work on the initiative; but without support from new leadership, it started to fall by the wayside.

“It just kind of dwindled, I guess. I don’t know how else to say it,” Muñoz recalled.

Ken Flemmer, Vice President of International Programs from 2010–2013, said that he was not involved with enditnow or a decision to discontinue it during his time working for Maier.

“I really had nothing to do with that,” he said.

Flemmer did remember hearing conversations questioning the utility of a signature gathering campaign.

At the end of 2011, Muñoz also left ADRA.

It remains unclear how intentionally enditnow was discontinued. The initiative had been pushed by Charles Sandefur and those who aligned with his vision; changes might be expected under different leadership.

Yet multiple reports from sources familiar with the situation suggest hostility to the program itself, not only in ADRA but in new leadership throughout the church.

“I think it was not just on the ADRA side,” another source familiar with enditnow said. “It was also on the General Conference. It was a combination of Rudi Maier on the ADRA side, and Ted Wilson on the General Conference side not wanting the program to continue.”

General Conference Executive Leadership did not respond to a formal request for comment on this story.

After the General Conference session in 2010, reporting is unable to confirm any instance of Ted Wilson or General Conference Executive Leadership publicly addressing enditnow for the next seven years.

By the start of 2012, there did not appear to be any enditnow activities happening at ADRA, and the Versacare Foundation became concerned that not all the grant money had been spent. As reported by *Spectrum* in 2012, Versacare president Robert Coy requested an account of the funds, eventually receiving a report showing \$86,000 of the original \$225,000 remained untouched.⁹ The funds were returned to Versacare.

When asked for this story about the precedent of Versacare money being returned, Sandefur, current Versacare board chair, noted that it is a fairly regular occurrence to have grantees return money to the foundation.

“That’s not unusual. It happens.”

When contacted for comment, Robert Coy, now Vice President of Versacare, said through a spokesperson that he did not have a specific recollection of that grant money or the circumstances under which it was returned.

While returned grant money might not have been an exceptional occurrence for Versacare, according to sources it was unusual for ADRA.

“I cannot remember ADRA returning funds because it was reluctant to fulfill the programmatic activities,” said one source familiar with the program. “That was very unusual and unfortunate.”

“It’s unusual for ADRA. The idea is to spend the money,” said another.

Those involved with enditnow wonder what could have been. In the months after the initiative launched, there were reports of marches and signature gathering efforts worldwide.

“There’s no question in my mind that if the program would have continued on the trajectory it was on... that we would have gotten the million signatures,” Julio Muñoz said.

While there were always some voices that questioned a signature gathering campaign, it was never the end goal for enditnow organizers but only a beginning. To Charles Sandefur, championing ending violence against women had the potential to become a core theme of Adventist identity, another feature in the church’s public witness.

“We do it on religious liberty, we do it on temperance. We’ve done it institutionally through health and not smoking. We wanted this to be another one,” he said.

One source familiar with enditnow thought there would have been more tangible programs had the initiative continued.

“I believe that there would have been far more women’s projects going and funded through ADRA had the

Pastors are the gatekeepers of the churches, and so if we want to reach the most people, we need to educate the pastors.

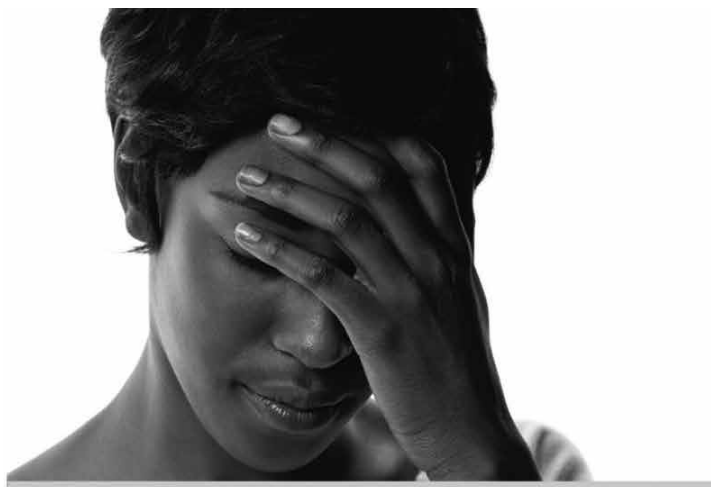
partnership [with Women's Ministries] continued," the source said.

Was there an inflection point close at hand in 2009 and 2010? The pieces were there: a movement with a global eye and a grassroots touch. At the same time, a fortuitous wealth of scientific research illuminated the specific problems of domestic violence within Adventism. Given more time, would the dots of mission, policy, advocacy, and research have been connected?

Reports continued to trickle in of enditnow events happening around the world. In 2011, the Jamaican Union Conference held what newspapers called a "mass rally." That year, the NAD held an enditnow summit geared toward pastors. In 2013, Adventists partnered with government officials in a number of South American countries, resulting in thousands of people taking to the streets in coordinated rallies and marches that were covered by major news outlets. In 2014, the NAD held another enditnow summit and, in 2015, ADRA transitioned its "Seven Campaign" on child abuse to be a part of enditnow.

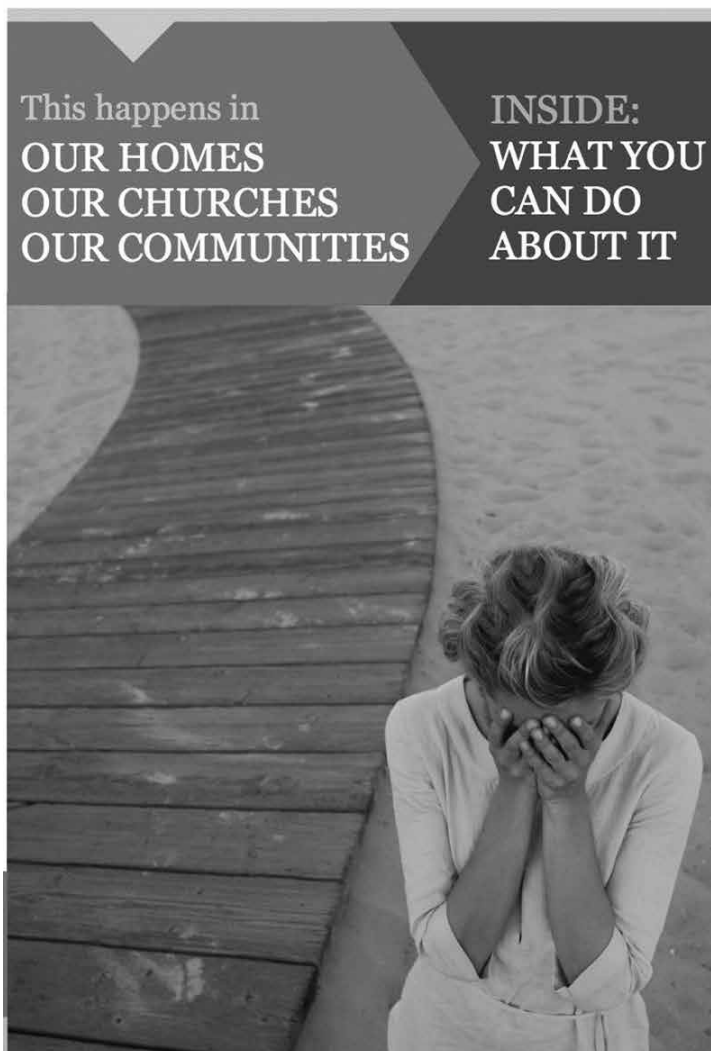
After watching the committee disband, Carla Baker decided focusing on pastors would be an effective way to continue enditnow in the NAD. "Pastors are the gatekeepers of the churches, and so if we want to reach the most people, we need to educate the pastors," she said.

Erica Jones became Assistant Director of NAD Women's Ministries in 2016 and saw an opportunity to do more in that vein. "I think the enditnow campaign had lost steam," Jones explained. "There wasn't one person saying, 'Hey, we've got to keep on with this.'... We needed somebody to take hold and re-energize it." Julio Muñoz also joined the NAD as Associate Director of Communication, and with strong advocates in the NAD, enditnow received a renewed energy. In 2017, rather than use the same



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format as past summits on abuse, the NAD live-streamed a series of speakers online—still targeted toward pastors—over two days. The online summit was watched by thousands worldwide.

In 2017, General Conference Executive Leadership broke its silence on enditnow. Ted Wilson, and his wife, Nancy, released separate video statements addressing enditnow. The Wilsons spoke against a full gamut of abuse,

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AGAINST THE VIOLENCE
TARGETED AT OUR WOMEN AND
CHILDREN**

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Minister of Community Safety**



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enditnow2018@gmail.com
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www.enditnow.org/about-end-it-now**

including child abuse, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, and domestic violence.¹⁰

Among sources familiar with enditnow who were asked for their thoughts on the statements, reactions were mixed.

“That’s good,” said one source. “One of the roles of senior leadership is showing that they support what is happening.”

“It’s too little, too late,” said another.

“I think it’s good, but in terms of providing global leadership and global support for the program from the General Conference, that has not been there,” said a former ADRA official familiar with enditnow.

Dr. René Drumm continued to do related academic work after publishing the 2009 qualitative study. Since the research had shown Adventist women often sought help from the church, in 2017, Drumm and coauthors published a study that gave pastors a half-day domestic violence training and tested the results.

“We learned that there was a lot of good learning that took place,” Drumm said. Six- and twelve-month follow-ups showed some of the new knowledge was retained, while some was also lost.¹¹

“Our training on domestic violence can’t just be a one-shot deal,” Drumm said.

This latest study was another step toward having actionable material that the church could use if it wished to, and Drumm was no longer content to sit on the sideline, watching what she saw as an inadequate response. There were people who were passionate and there were resources—from pastor training to church policies to written publications—already in existence. Even though Drumm did not work for the church, she intended to turn nearly two decades of research into real and palpable change.

Along with former Andrews colleagues, Drumm—now working at the University of Southern Mississippi—planned a conference. “The purpose of the meeting was to bring together church leaders,” Drumm said, “To see if it is possible to do more than have a committee meeting, and to take actions that the church entities could endorse. Just basic agreement on things we can work together on.”

Attendees flew to Hawaii for two days of meetings in March 2018. There were representatives from Adventist universities and multiple NAD departments. Raquel Arrais, Assistant Director of Women’s Ministries, and Abner De Los Santos, General Vice President of the world church, also attended. The talk was direct; there were certain truths that all had to agree with before moving forward. Abuse is a problem in the Adventist Church. What needs to be done in terms of policy? What needs to be done in terms of resources?

After so many years wishing to see the progress her research called for, Drumm sat at a table united in purpose with both academics and church officials.

“It was amazing,” she said. “I was not disappointed.”

The 2018 NAD live-stream summit took place on September 24 and 25.

Speakers presented diverse topics, targeted at pastors but often relevant to a wider audience, addressing domestic violence but also pastor abuse and child sexual abuse. The first day was in Spanish, the second in English, and both days included presentations by abuse survivors.¹²

Throughout the years of work, Drumm always recognized the need to speak about domestic violence in terms that transcend numbers and statistics.

“I think that we need to keep looking for ways to really reach the hearts of pastors, not just their minds,” she said.

“One of the women who attended [the Hawaii] conference was a victim herself, an abuse survivor,” Erica Jones remembered. “She shared her story with us, and I don’t think there was a dry eye in the room. It really gave meaning and purpose, that this is about people.”

We spoke just once before, on the phone, briefly. I had been given only a name and a phone number. Talk to Karla.¹³ She is one amazing survivor.

On an early fall day, I traveled to her hometown and drove to the address she had provided. The colors of the maple, oak, and birch trees must have only just begun to turn in earnest, I thought, as the midday sun still warmed the air with a measure of the heat of summer, and I was beguiled into wearing short sleeves. Pulling up to her address, I saw a tidy yard on a quiet street. I had passed two Adventist churches on the way.

But of course, nothing about the drive had been remarkable, none of the turns surprising, the colors of the leaves just what I expected—for this had been my hometown, too.

When I began researching on enditnow and the Adventist Church’s handling of domestic violence, I expected to navigate various levels of church governance, wade through labyrinths of committees, parse official statements; yet I never thought I would end up back in my childhood hometown, the place where I had gone to church and school, where I had lived a generally blessed childhood.

And yet, perhaps there is no more fitting a way to understand domestic violence than to peel back the tranquil veneer of a place that you thought you knew, only to see the undergirding of pain and horror that existed all along.

Karla appeared on the porch, greeting me warmly as we entered her immaculate living room. Sitting down on the couch, that remnant summer light streamed through the window and onto my shoulders, also alighting on the tiny specks of dust that hovered in the still air. She told me her story.

I got married. Great guy.

No problems. Then he started becoming abusive, and he got into pornography, to make a long story short. About five years into our marriage, we had a daughter who was born with down syndrome. At the hospital, when we found out, he closed the door and told me, “You have a choice. If we were in a house burning down and you could only save one person, the baby or me, who would it be?”

And I said, “I wouldn’t choose. I would take both of you.” And he kept saying this over and over. “Then he started choking me, saying, “We can always have another child. You would choose me.” I feared for my baby’s life if I took her home, so I put her up for adoption. And at that point, a part of me died.

Perhaps there is no more fitting a way to understand domestic violence than to peel back the tranquil veneer of a place that you thought you knew, only to see the undergirding of pain and horror that existed all along.

Abuse starts slowly, and you get used to it. You learn to do things that make them happy, that don't make them mad.

Eventually Karla and her husband had two more children, but while they built what looked to outside observers to be the perfect family, the abuse only intensified.

The pornography got worse and the sexual abuse became worse. Through the years, he would tie me up and rape me. That was almost an everyday thing. I got to the point where I wanted to die. I could not keep living the way I was. Nobody at church knew—nobody knew. My husband was friends with all the pastors. He was a deacon. We would go to church and everybody thought we were just the perfect little family, but nobody knew what was happening behind closed doors.

One day on her way to work, Karla decided she would drive into a telephone pole and end the suffering. She had stepped on the accelerator with resolution when the radio started sounding louder and louder in her ears. A song was playing, "Choose life that you may live," the lyrics said.

She pulled the car over.

A few days later, a friend saw Karla rubbing her wrists. Only a few hours before, she had been bound by leather straps in her home, and her wrists still throbbed. Somehow, in that moment, it all came pouring out. She told her friend everything—the abuse, the rape, the suicide attempt.

"I had never told anybody."

The friend helped Karla make an appointment with a counselor.

"Through that, I was able to start telling somebody my deep, dark secret. I was ashamed. I felt so dirty, and I felt like nobody would believe me."

Karla went to the counselor in secret and always left her cellphone on, for her husband might call at any time and demand to know her location. The counselor convinced Karla to go to a women's shelter, run by Adventists, that was located out of town. To get permission from her husband, Karla told him it was a center for depression. When she arrived, she slept for two days straight; it was the first time she had been able to go to sleep without fearing something would happen during the night.

Eventually Karla returned home, but soon she would resolve to leave her husband for good. Even with that determination, her ordeal was far from over. She went to her pastor, hoping to receive help and guidance.

I went to his office and said, "My husband is abusing me." And I gave him some instances.

He looked at me, and he said, "I find that hard to believe. Do you want me to talk to him?" I don't remember what else he said after that. It was all muffled. I just remember getting up and saying, "Forget I was ever here." I was devastated. It was like a knife had been put in my back.

She made her way to the police station, where a domestic-violence officer helped prepare paperwork to put in place a restraining order and start legal proceedings. She felt safe going to the police because her husband was out of town, but just as she was leaving the station, her husband called and said he wanted to meet. Karla told him she was out running errands and to meet her at the grocery store. Frantic to do something with the police paperwork she was carrying, she opened the trunk, lifted the spare tire, and slid it into the tire well. They went shopping without incident, but when they came out with their groceries, Karla's heart skipped a beat. One of her tires was flat.

"I thought to myself, Lord, what are you doing to me?" But instead of taking out the spare tire, her husband

Doctrines about headship are espoused by many leaders, doctrines that regardless of the intention or sentiment are taken by abusers to justify their acts and create power imbalances.

decided to air up the flat at a nearby gas station and the paperwork remained hidden.

Karla filed for separation, but the nightmare was far from over. Her husband had used her name on bank paperwork and creditors came demanding payment, forcing her to declare bankruptcy. Life would go on, but she would always be haunted in so many ways by what had been.

“I was married for twenty-five years, and I was abused for twenty-five years.”

Karla leaned back on the sofa. Throughout telling her story, she had spoken with a measured tone, her voice steady and clear, only ever containing the faintest hint of a tremor as she spoke of those years, many of which blur together as her mind still struggles to comprehend the horror and fear that was everyday life. She is still active in her church, which she has never stopped attending, though it took years to feel like she was fully comfortable there again, without imagining that she heard whispers behind her back.

Listening to Karla, it was impossible not to think about the dimensionality of domestic violence. She had been abused physically, emotionally, sexually, even spiritually—her husband would quote Bible verses about wives submitting to their husbands and say God hates divorce.

Mustering the courage to even reach out to a leader at her church took enormous fortitude, for while Karla would have been much more comfortable going to another woman for help, there was not a single female pastor. The church was Karla’s haven and deepest network of support, but when she needed it most, when she went to her pastor looking for help to begin a path of liberation and healing, she was rebuffed with the most painful words she could imagine: I don’t believe you.

“What would it have meant to hear a sermon condemning abuse when you were still with your husband?” I asked. “Would it have meant something to hear a pastor tell you there were resources to get help?”

“Oh, definitely,” she said. “It would have given me some hope.”

All the complications were there in her story. While there are elements of Adventism that speak a message of healing and justice to the victim of domestic violence—

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godly relationships and a supportive faith community, for example—there are barriers and demons that must be reckoned with. Doctrines about headship are espoused by many leaders; doctrines, that regardless of the intention or sentiment, are taken by abusers to justify their acts and create power imbalances. Seventh-day Adventist faith leaders, whether at a local level or the highest church governance, remain a majority male, creating another barrier for understanding and a lack of facility for women victims reaching out for help.

Perhaps most of all, there is a need to lift the veil of secrecy and abandon the ill-guided belief that abuse is not a problem within Seventh-day Adventist communities. Data proves the extent of the problem, yet it takes the voices of survivors, men and women—but most often women—to tell their story; yet to be able to speak,

they need to feel they are not alone, and that their stories will be taken, believed, and acted upon.

Before #metoo became a worldwide phenomenon, there was enditnow. Its creators and proponents envisioned a bold wave of activism and programmatic change that would sweep Adventism, but also extend a hand to the entire world to unite with Adventism in an inexorable voice. Perhaps that opportunity passed by; perhaps that opportunity is around the corner. Perhaps enditnow is a hopelessly optimistic phrase—that the violence could ever end outright or that the change could happen immediately—but it also communicates an urgency that you will hear in the voices of those involved, both past and present.

Karla has traveled across her region and even the entire United States telling her story, to pastor trainings and women's conferences. Then this year she was invited to fly to Hawaii to sit at a table with an assortment of church leaders, telling her story and giving feedback about what resources might have helped her all those years ago when she sat in a pew, afraid to even admit to a survey that she suffered from abuse. There is pain in telling that story, but it also gives her purpose.

"I just hope more women speak out," she said.

End Notes

1. To hear Dr. René Drumm talk about the study, listen to Episode 25 of the Adventist Peace Radio podcast. A second interview also talks with Dr. Melissa Ponce-Rodas, assistant professor of psychology at Andrews University, about her research into domestic violence within Hispanic communities. <http://www.adventistpeace.org/blogcontent/2018/8/20/adventist-peace-radio-episode-25-intimate-partner-violence>.

2. There had been some previous academic work that also suggested the relationship between religion and domestic violence was more complicated than originally thought. See the following studies: Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, Elaine Grandin, and Eugen Lupri, "Religious Involvement and Spousal Violence: The Canadian Case," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31, No. 1 (1992): 15–31. Christopher G. Ellison, and Kristin L. Anderson, "Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence Among U.S. Couples," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, No. 2 (2001): 269–86. For more on the complicated ways women survivors of domestic violence seek help from their faith communities, see the work of Dr. Nancy Nason-Clark, author of *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (1997).

3. The studies by René Drumm, et al, "Intimate Partner Violence in a Conservative Christian Denomination: Prevalence and Types," *Social Work & Christianity* 33, No. 3 (2006): 233–51. René D. Drumm, Marciana Popescu, and Matt L. Riggs, "Gender Variation in Partner Abuse," *Affilia* 24, No. 1 (2009): 56–68.

4. Charles Sandefur also chaired the Versacare Board but was not responsible for daily operations.

5. Sources familiar with the project were not certain about the exact number when asked for this story, but matching ADRA funds were likely no greater than the Versacare grant.

6. For a contemporaneous account of the launch see Megan Brauner, "Adventist Church, ADRA Launch Campaign to Stop Violence against Women," Adventist News Network, October 14, 2009. <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2009-10-14/adventist-church-adra-launch-campaign-to-stop-violence-against-women/>.

7. Alita Byrd, "Looking for Lessons in the ADRA Leadership Change," *Spectrum* (Summer 2012): 38–50.

8. Rudi Maier left ADRA in 2012. When asked for comment on enditnow for this story, ADRA International provided the following statement:

A majority of the beneficiaries ADRA provides relief aid around the world are women and girls, who unfortunately at times are the most susceptible to domestic violence after a natural disaster occurs. In support of educational campaigns like End It Now [sic], ADRA affirms its commitment to protect its beneficiaries, including women and girls facing domestic violence, so they have the right to protection, may realize their worth, and live full meaningful lives free from violence, sexual exploitation, and all other forms of abuse. In countries where domestic violence is particularly rampant, ADRA has established places of refuge for women and girls to escape and recover from the emotional and physical trauma of abuse, but much work to tackle the issue of domestic violence is to be done. When people start by investing in initiatives like End It Now [sic], the livelihoods for women, girls, and everyone benefits. In turn, families are healthier, and communities are stronger.

9. Precise numbers from reporting in *Spectrum*, Summer 2012. Sources familiar with the situation were unable to remember precise numbers when asked for this story.

10. To read/watch the dual statements see: "Seventh-day Adventist Church President's Statement on END IT NOW," Adventist News Network, August 24, 2017. <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2017-08-24/seventh-day-adventist-church-presidents-statement-on-end-it-now/>.

11. René D. Drumm, et al, "Clergy Training for Effective Response to Intimate Partner Violence Disclosure: Immediate and Long-term Benefits," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 37, No. 1(2018): 77–93.

12. For an account of the 2018 summit, see the *Adventist Review* report: <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story12947-adventist-church-does-not-tolerate-abuse-of-any-form>. Links to videos from the 2017 and 2018 summits can be found at enditnownorthamerica.org.

13. Karla is not her real name, but rather the name she uses when telling her story.



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