

February 2, 1992
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Dear Friends, (to be shared with anyone)

Colorado!! I understand the sexual situation there and have you all in my heart and prayers. Your concerns are my concerns, and I know what you are up against in not being heard by the authorities in the church. I read an account, on a similar situation, of a priest in the Catholic church. He had messed with a number of altar boys (he thought he was giving them love - a distorted thinking). The Bishops wouldn't hear the victims so they went to the law. The collected victims were granted a total of one million dollars from the church for damages and to pay for long-time counseling.

I doubt that you will move the workers to do anything. They are too far into denial, too lacking in knowledge of emotional damage to the victim, and too far into religious pride and insecurity. This is where the prayer of Jesus fits so well, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing in this type of problem." Workers have joined the world in playing the game of "blaming the victim" and minimizing the deeds of the abuser.

I understand sexual abuse so well - it's in my family. A nephew was "mildly" abused by his Grandfather at age 6. Grandpa's reward to him for the sexual deed was ice cream and cake. This nephew went for alcohol treatment at age 13, weight kept going up, until at age 27 he is over 300 pounds and has been to alcohol treatment twice in the last 3 years. Thus, I join the professionals who say, "There is no mild abuse, only severe damage to the victim." This is soul murdering and needs to be stopped at any cost. If a child has to live with this "dirty secret" (and when it involves a minister it involves God, so is the most damaging form of abuse) it will kill him emotionally.

It will show on him or her at school. They could be sent to the school counselor and it would have to be reported to the law by the counselor. The law may declare homes and parents unfit that allow such in the home, and put the children in foster homes. How can I impress the seriousness of sexual abuse of children in any form or degree? This dirty past enters into married life and hinders, divorces come. Victims develop serious emotional eating disorders, often turn to alcohol and drugs, and become sexual abusers themselves. I learned recently that a nine year old girl was molested in a cornfield on convention grounds over thirty years ago. It came out in her alcoholism counseling The worker married later, molested his own children, and spent time in prison.

I doubt that the law can do much about the grown women who have been abused unless they can prove rape. Women need to learn to speak up and to use their fist on the end of the nose of the abuser. He really isn't God's true servant. I highly recommend that the victims attend a 12-step incest survivors group, and get to counseling for sexual abuse. (Lutheran Family Services is good.) The counselors can determine the amount of the emotional abuse, advise you on the law, and would likely even testify in court on behalf of the victim. Professing counselors would be out as they are bound by the authority of

the church. Shop around until you find a good one - many went into counseling because of their own abuse, so readily understand. Would you want your children to testify in court? It would help the healing process if you get it all in the open. This undercurrent hassle, over it all, isn't good for children either. The law may not send the abuser to prison, but there may be counseling expenses covered, limits put on the abuser - like not to stay in homes where there are children, not be able to attend convention, etc. In some states, the law says it has to be reported soon. Only the victim can tell what really happened. Really, it is doing the abuser a favor to stop him. This is an addiction that starts often with just touching, and goes farther and farther. The abuser has to do this to survive emotionally. It is very possible that he was sexually abused himself. Professionals say that very few abusers get help - they are only treated. They cry and repent and may want to be different but they have sexual addictions and can't change.

The victim needs to know it is a courageous act to turn in their abuser, even if it is their favorite worker. They may be saving others from the pain they have borne. If these victims become abusers, what will the church come to? Someone has to break the addiction. I dealt with 70 victims during my 30 years in the work, besides my family.

An ex-worker, still caring

Fern Strouse (deceased)

(date unknown)

By Fern Strouse (Ex-communicated Sister Worker)

Dear Ones,

It seems to concern some that I'm not going to church mtgs. I'll try to explain again! It is very important that I get some money laid up that will work for me when I'm too old to work. My years for doing this are few, at age 60. I work evenings, nights, weekends, days – when would I go to mtg.? My fellowship with God is deep and my soul is being so abundantly fed. There is no reason for concern and besides it is my business. Thanks for caring.

No, I have not left the church or am I against it. I did leave the ministry, (before I was put out) because my interest in alcoholism, **sexual abuse**, and emotional problems, etc. I am still ministering, in a different capacity, that thrills my soul to be so God used, and being so much appreciated.

However, there are some things that I have left, which I feel very good about. These things were not easily shed. I have left dishonesty – (wearing a mask, and sweeping under the rug). I have left the traditions of man and his restrictions for an obedience to God alone. I have left off “closed-mindedness” that hindered me from being “all things” to all people. I have left off being “holier than thou” to become easily approached. I have left off judging others (playing God) to “Let God!” (And not controlling because of my insecurity.) I have great freedom when I leave off worshipping the creature more than the Creator. I have left off the “Thou shalt nots” to have the Christ within me. I have left off the lack of mercy and compassion, realizing that love is the only way to the very core of another human being. I have left off ignoring others questions, and feeling threatened, because I have learned that questioning is neither rebellion or dissent, but a desire to understand, and to participate, and is a real sign of love and maturity. Leaving off and putting on has brought so much freedom and liberty in Christ. I have learned the value of communication.

Love and care,

Fern Strouse (Deceased)