

Ending the Cycle of Abuse in the Church of God

by Laura Lee (Bismarck, North Dakota)

If you saw an old woman being robbed, would you help her? If you knew a child was being sexually molested, would you report it to the proper authorities? If you knew a woman was being abused by her husband, would you help her? If you heard a man beating his wife, would you call the police? If you knew someone had just lost a loved one, would you be a friend? If you knew someone had a family member who was mentally ill, would you be a friend?

If you saw, or knew about any of the above, would you look the other way if the person needing your assistance was not affiliated with your church group? If you saw a person in your church group being mistreated by other brethren or by the ministry, would you go and assist or befriend your brother or your sister, or would you look the other way?

In the past, I Laura, was in a situation before I ever heard of the Churches of God, where my now ex-husband, beat me to the point of unconsciousness. I don't remember much about the ambulance ride. At a point when I was able, I went next door to talk to the young woman who called the police, and probably saved my life. I made a point of getting to know this young woman a little bit better, because she helped me when I needed help.

By this point, I had been severely beaten many times over the course of a 2 year period by this man. No one had ever called the police before, when they heard me scream. People even walked in when I would scream and would tell my ex-husband to keep the noise down. When I tried to get away he would come looking for me. Once I got relatives to help me get out, and then they said I couldn't stay with them, because they were afraid this man would hurt their own families. Do people as a general rule help when they see a need? My experiences say no, they don't.

Why then, did this young woman call the police that night, truly putting her own life at risk? I will never forget what she said, as long as I live. She said "I heard you screaming and screaming for help, and then there was dead silence. I was afraid you were dead, so I called the police."

That doesn't say much for our society does it? How can a person listen to another person being beaten and not even call the police until they are afraid the person being beaten is dead. I did have to give this young woman credit for having called the police at all. It was much more than anyone else had ever done for me in this 2 year period.

If you were being abused by your church, ministry, brethren, would you keep silent? If you saw your brothers and sisters in your church being abused, would you keep silent? Abuse of people is something most don't want to deal with. Why? People just seem to look the other way when they see it. Is it because we are not educated in how to stop it?

Many people leave abusive situations, and then remain silent for whatever their reason might be. This silence does not help others to see that they are not alone, and it also does not help people to break the abuse cycle in their own homes and churches. It is a difficult thing for a woman to get out of an abusive marriage, because there is little to no help from family and friends. Unless a woman can find good counsel through a shelter, it is hard for her to get any help or support, to enable her to break from the family abuse cycle. Even once a woman first tries to break from that abuse cycle, it may take years to actually get physically free of the family abuse. In my own case, it took me 4 years to get out of this abusive relationship, and several years before I stopped having nightmares.

On November 17, 1999, I Laura, was suspended from the [United Church of God an International Association](#). On October 26, 2000, I and my husband Darwin, were disfellowshipped from the [United Church of God an International Association](#). While dealing with the ministry in [this organization](#), we saw confusion, abuse of power, control of people, and a craziness, which just cannot be put into words and relayed to others. We noticed that when we tried to tell people what happened or was happening to us, they looked at us as though we were crazy. We had to stand back and ask the question, "Would we even believe our own story if someone else told it?" We thought, no, we wouldn't. Perhaps there are people out there who can relate to this form of craziness displayed by ministry in this or other organizations.

The main ingredient to stop abuse in any situation, whether it be family, or church, is to talk about it. Do not remain in silence. By telling your story, you not only help other people, but you also expose the abuser. When an abuser is exposed they loose their power to hurt others. By exposing an abuser, you force the abuser into taking responsibility for their own actions. The abuses going on right now in some of the churches of God are too numerous to list, so I'll only state a couple of them. When a minister tells you that you have caused another person to stop talking to you, shun you or mistreat you in anyway, it is an abuse. You are not responsible for the bad actions of another person. When a minister uses confusing wording, such as unbound does not mean free to remarry or when they use the word recommend, when it really means, we command you, it is an abuse. Do not keep silent when you know that you or someone else is being abused.

I and my husband Darwin are only 2 people, but we want to help to bring peace to the churches of God and to

stop the abuses from continuing. We are not counselors or anything like that, but we are willing to listen. We are just ordinary people, who had opportunity to document the abuses we experienced in the fellowship we were a part of. **Our document** is 98 pages (111 pages) long at this point. If anyone is interested in reading it, we are offering our story free to anyone who writes and asks for a copy. We will not remain silent when we know our brothers and sisters are being hurt. We urge everyone to speak out and stop this cycle of abuse within the churches of God. We are commanded to love one another, by this shall all men know... John 13:34-35.

There aren't too many options for church of God services in the Bismarck, North Dakota area. So in June 2000, we opened our home up to have fellowship with others, and for **Bible Study**. We are not a big group, and we welcome all people from any organization with open arms. We are an interdependent group and usually have these **bible studies** every 6 weeks on a Friday night. At this time we send out the information via mail for anyone who is interested in being put on our mailing list. In the future we hope to open up our home for possible phone hook up **church services** and fellowship on Saturdays, if there is an interest. Write to be put on our mailing list.

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