

Eric Nelson – South Dakota, removed from meetings

May 22

WINGS Note: Eric Nelson is an elder in South Dakota who was recently removed from meetings due to allegations.

The notification from workers is posted below, followed by a letter from one of the victims.

Dear friends in SD,

It is our understanding Eric Nelson of Edgemont, SD has allegations of CSA (child sexual abuse) against him. We are also aware of an allegation of texting and requesting lewd material with an adult female.

We have asked Eric to not attend any meetings through the remainder of 2023. We will revisit the situation then.

We encourage any victims to reach out to the following resources or to speak to someone you can trust. RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is an anti-sexual violence organization.

They can be visited at <https://www.rainn.org> . RAINN also operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE for adult victims of sexual abuse.

The number to report CSA in SD is 1-877-244-0064.

We are sorry to share this sad news. This is a public matter.

Respectfully,
Perry Pearson
Paul Haakenson

Victim's story

I am a victim. Not just a victim of sexual abuse, but a victim of a system that protects, defends, and provides the perfect breeding ground for CSA. This system repeatedly failed me as a preteen and caused lasting damage. I wanted to share my story.

When I was 12 years old a young couple moved to my hometown and started going to meeting with my family. The man was charming, funny and endearing. Little did I know that he was purposefully and methodically laying the groundwork to abuse and beginning the grooming process. He quickly became good friends with my dad and brothers. Joining them on hunting, fishing trips etc. Him and his wife also would have us over often for "young kids get together" and even staying overnight with us kids so my parents could have a night out. Which is when the abuse began.

A few years went by, and during that time they continued to be close with my family as well as other young families and couples in the area. They also took the steps to become foster parents, and eventually he became the president of the Foster Parent Association in our town. He was well liked and respected.

All the while he had me in his sights, he had gained the trust of church members, my family and friends, and now he had access to me whenever and however he wanted. He got to be so brazen in what he was doing that eventually everyone knew what was going on. At one get together someone was wondering where he was and his own wife told them to go find me and that's where he would be as well. He also admitted his crimes to another adult professing man, who in turn treated it like a fun piece of gossip and not the gross sexual abuse it was. Every single adult turned a blind eye and refused to protect me.

One of the hardest things for sexually abuse survivors to grapple with is blaming themselves. I was an insecure preteen and what I can clearly see now was abuse, at the time felt like love and attention. One of the greatest weapons abusers use is the ability to make it feel like it is your fault and therefore you keep silent.

It was a couple years of this abuse, when finally his wife eventually discovered evidence on his computer of his abuse towards me and as well as other girls. I called her up and tearfully apologized. All she said was he was an adult and should've known better and it was never spoken about again.

I was forever changed. It affected every aspect of my life. I lived with constant guilt that I was a homewrecker. I was 14 when it ended. 14 years old with the entire blame on my shoulders. And I carried that burden with me for years.

But that's only half of the story. The second half begins when in adulthood I began to heal, I went to therapy where I finally grasped the gravity of the situation. The heaviness. How absolutely not ok it was. How it was NOT my fault. How not a single adult at the time who knew with the utmost certainty that this was happening was not willing to protect a child. How the church had created a culture where you turned the other way and "let God deal with it". I learned of more friends and workers who knew what was happening but chose not to believe it. My therapist was required by law to report the abuse to the authorities but of course the statutes of limitations had run out and there was nothing that could be done legally. That lit a fire under me to not ever let this man hurt another girl. But I had an uphill battle.

In the town where this man and his family now lived there were lots of young girls. He had also been made the elder of a Sunday morning meeting. I made it my mission to make sure they were aware of what this man was capable of. But it was met with lots of backlash and no one wanting to be the one to rock the boat. I eventually met with the overseer of my state and told him and another brother worker my story. The overseer then consulted with the overseer in my home state and together they decided because he was a foster parent he would've taken classes on Child Sexual Abuse and surely learned from that. I was absolutely flabbergasted. He had abused me AFTER he had taken these classes and If you need a class to teach you sexually abusing children Is wrong you are a danger and every parent in the church deserved to know what he was capable of. But there was still great hesitation, I was even told that the girls living in the area were "good girls" and they wouldn't "let" him do anything to them. Finally they agreed to talk to him and take the meeting out of his home, as well as make other families in the area aware.

Two brother workers went to meet with him and his wife There were sister workers in the field at the time, they did not tell the sisters why they were meeting with him. Apparently that wasn't important information for two women who were going to be staying in this man's home to know. Not to mention, this piece of information was never passed on to incoming workers to the field and a meeting was eventually placed in his home again, as the new workers had no knowledge of these events.

One of the brothers met with me after their visit and spoke so highly of this man. He had admitted to all the allegations and admitted to having a problem with young girls. These brothers then spent a wonderful weekend in his home and were so encouraged by his progress. I felt their feedback spoke volumes to the level of deceit and manipulation predators are capable of, which is what makes them so dangerous. He knew exactly what these brothers wanted to hear.

These days this pedophile has children that are teenagers. I know of parents of teenage girls who are unknowingly sending their daughters on road trips to this mans home for "young kid get togethers" with his kids and my heart just sinks. I don't want ANYONE to go through what I went through and I feel like it is impossible to protect children in the

current church climate. I wanted to add my story to the chorus of many others. Unfortunately, my story is not unique and my heart breaks for every single person who has been violated at hands of someone who portrayed themselves as a Godly professing person and then felt hopeless, helpless and defeated by everyone who stood by and did nothing. You are believed and you deserved better.