

Letter from Canadian worker Alanna McDonald to friends – April 2023

Dear Friends,

The past few weeks you have been hit with a tremendous amount of difficult news. As hard as it is to talk about and hear these things, it is much safer and healthier to have them out in the open where they can be dealt with. The shocking truth that many of you are just seeing now is this: that there are workers and overseers who are abusive. That there are workers and overseers who are willing to lie, manipulate, ignore and minimize in order to cover up abuse. It may sometimes seem like we are all in on it, that “workers” as a whole are complicit in this outrageous abuse, to varying degrees. There are many of us who have been fighting as hard as we can to have these issues addressed transparently and in a way that prevents further abuse. There may be more of us than you realize who feel like you do: betrayed, distressed and eager for things to improve.

I could have written you years ago and told you this: as a worker on your staff here in Québec and Atlantic Canada I was abused by several of my coworkers. There were other workers on our staff who did not abuse me directly, but who participated in spreading rumours about me, making me feel unwelcome on our staff, and who stood by while the abuse occurred. There are others still who have been a wonderful support, and for them I am thankful.

Why didn't I write sooner? Why didn't I tell you this as soon as it happened?

I was told explicitly and repeatedly that if the friends (including my immediate natural family) ever found out what had happened and what was happening still, that they would get discouraged, stop going to meeting, and ultimately lose their salvation. In other words, if I told you that I had been abused, I would be responsible for your lost eternity.

If there is one way to strike fear into the heart of a zealous young worker just starting out, that is it: tell them they will send people to Hell by talking about their experiences.] There are things that happen within the kingdom that are difficult to understand and accept as true, as we assume they have no place among God's people or ministry. There are many reasons victims are not taken seriously when abuse allegations against workers are brought forward. Some of these hurdles include:

- Belief that workers are perfect
- Belief that overseers are chosen by the Spirit and led by God in their decision-making
- Belief that if severe abuse had occurred, it would have been dealt with properly and it would have been disclosed (When a worker remains active or is moved to another province/area to labour, it casts doubt on a victim's credibility)
- Reports from other workers and friends that the accused worker is “appreciated” and “helpful”
- Belief that young workers are weaker or less willing
- Belief that a worker with thirty years in the work is more credible than a worker who has been active for only a few years
- Belief that young workers struggle in the work because of their personal histories, underlying ‘nerve problems’, wanting marriage/a home/children/etc. and not because of the treatment they receive from their coworkers
- Belief that a worker who is abusive will be identifiable by their spirit
- Belief that abuse is always obvious and recognizable
- Belief that victims will always understand what happened and be able to clearly identify it (this may include understanding or articulating why they had to leave the work)

- Belief that these issues are best dealt with by older brother workers
- Belief that older brothers approach these issues with compassion and concern
- Belief that issues like these are not minimized or covered up

Those have sometimes seemed like impossible hurdles to clear. If talking about what happened to me was going to be helpful and productive, I would need to be believed. My voice, my story, would have to triumph over all of these deeply ingrained and closely held beliefs.

What chance did I have? What chance did any of us victims have? We had already been dismissed by our overseers, scoffed at by fellow workers, called liars and troublemakers and rebels. We had already been regarded as weak and unwilling. We had already been re-victimized every time we tried to talk about what happened. And, worst of all, despite our very best efforts to protect our sisters and brothers and you friends, we had to watch as our abusers were given access to other innocent people. We had tried to sound the warning, and we had been thoroughly shot down.

We took the course of action that we were told was appropriate. It was not sufficient.

I know that, for many of you, hearing about workers behaving in inappropriate and criminal ways is a huge shock. I know that the shock of hearing hurts. And the last thing I want is to hurt you.

But allowing these evils to flourish in our midst is even more hurtful than hearing the truth. Covering up abuse and creating an environment for it to flourish is the most damaging thing we can do to one another. And so, I love you all enough to tell you the truth, to be honest about what has been going on.

How can I express how much I love you all? Your care and sincerity and love for God has kept me active in the work. I have continued, even when I thought it was absolutely impossible, that I had finally reached the last of my strength and breathed my last spiritual breath, because every single day I was with you – God’s people, his sheep, the bride he is preparing for his son. And I could see how much he loves you. And I could see that he wants vessels available to bring you his word. He wants you to be fed and nurtured. And he wants a living expression of his care here on earth. And so, if he was willing to use me to minister to you, I would do everything possible to fill that place and to keep filling it for as long as I possibly could.

There are wonderful, sincere, zealous workers who have been unable to continue in the work. They love you too, and did everything they could to be able to stay.

When I started in the work, I wasn’t totally naive. I knew that workers are people. I knew that workers aren’t perfect. I knew that they make mistakes.

What shocked me to my core was to find out that workers were immoral *and they still continued in the work, even when other workers knew what they were doing.*

I knew that being in the work wouldn’t always be easy. I knew there would be times when I would struggle. I knew that my relationships with my coworkers wouldn’t always be perfect, that sometimes we would disagree.

But what I couldn’t believe, what I *still* struggle to believe even after all these years of it being made abundantly clear, is that there would be workers who would hate me. Who would actually despise me. Who would make me feel like they wished I was dead. Who would do everything they could to try and get me to leave the work. Who would concoct stories about me to turn others against me.

It was very difficult to believe that there were people who deliberately wanted to hurt myself and others. It was much easier to believe that I was the problem, and they did a very good job of

convincing me that I was. That I was weak. Unwilling. Rebellious. Worthless. That I had misinterpreted things. That I was exaggerating.

It was very helpful to have some things recorded on paper about my experiences, evidence I could turn to that showed I hadn't invented or exaggerated anything. It was very helpful to have the support of fellow workers who had experienced similar things from the same people; we could assure one another that we were not alone in the struggle. There were professionals who confirmed that what we were experiencing was emotional/psychological abuse. Above all, I had a loving God and a very compassionate Saviour who were always very close to me, who heard my cry and regarded every tear that fell. Their deep, tender hearts preserved my life and gave me courage to keep going.

When my story was repeatedly called into question, dismissed, minimized, and disregarded, I wondered if I'd failed to adequately express it. I decided the failure of the overseers to take adequate action was my fault, that if I had explained things more clearly they would understand the extent of the damage and how badly I had been hurt. How it had very nearly killed me. I wondered if they would have acted if I'd spoken louder. Or if I'd been quieter. Or if I had been more articulate. Or maybe I was *too* articulate, and they couldn't see my pain. Maybe if I'd been more passionate. If my emotions had been more raw. Or maybe my emotions overwhelmed them or made me seem weak, and I should have tempered them. Maybe then they would have listened. Maybe then they would have understood.

I heard some of my brothers and sisters' cries for help. I heard them and they are lodged forever in my heart. They were not faint. They were not insignificant.

I can believe, then, that my own cry was worthy of regarding as well. That when I wept in the presence of these men with oversight, it *should* have touched their hearts. That when I described the horrors I had experienced, it *should* have awakened a need to act.

Our overseers heard our cries and they turned their back and walked away.

God hears even our faintest cry. And it matters to him.

Love is the most powerful thing we have. I didn't expect being in the work to be perfect. But I did expect that we would love each other. After all, what is even the point if we don't? What are we here for if not to care and nourish and protect each other? What is our foundation if it is not divine love?

My dear friends, I have tried every avenue available to me to make this situation better. I have been unable to make changes significant enough to prevent further abuse, or even to fully heal myself.

We need your help. I can give you no clear instruction about what is the appropriate way forward. It's not my place to do so. I just plead with you all to pray fervently and with this desire and intent: that God's will be accomplished here on earth as it is in Heaven. That we will all be willing for our part in making his kingdom healthy and safe and right. That we will take action when we need to, in standing for the truth, in joining the battle for the truth. That we will speak when words are necessary. That we will serve God and not man.

I may never fully trust any human being ever again. That is something that the enemy, who is a thief, has taken away from me. But I will continue to trust God, who does not and cannot lie. God is faithful. God loves us, and isn't trying to hurt us. Satan wants this to tear us all away from God.

God is grieved more than any of us. He hates this evil more than we even have the capacity to. He has prepared an eternal destination for all of these things: evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murder, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness/ lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy/slander, pride/arrogance and folly.

These things proceed from the heart. And they defile us. They defile us as individuals first. If they are not taken care of and removed, they defile the kingdom. They defile our fellowship. They defile our relationships as coworkers. They defile our fellowship meetings. They defile our conventions, and every special privilege. They defile our conversations. They defile our homes.

God has made it very clear how he feels about these things, and that they are to have no place among us. Have we truly examined what these things are, and how they take place? What does envy actually look like? What does malice sound like? What does it feel like to be at the receiving end of an evil eye?

We must be searched and made right. We *must* be brought into the light. God has opened his heart and mind very wide to us. He has let us see into the depths of who he is. Why would we ever try to hide who and what we are from him?

There are many many times on record when God had to root out problems from among his people. These problems are here. They are massive. And they are destructive. So, will we sit back and let them eat away at our fellowship, our peace, our relationship with God? Or will we be honest and truly repent. God has healed his people before and he can do it again.

But not if we keep denying that there are problems. Not if we slap a bandaid on gaping wounds and declare "peace, peace" where there is no peace. Not if we go about covering our eyes and plugging our ears. Not if we prophesy like the false prophets of old – making hollow promises and pretending there is no need to change.

God's people, his way on the earth, his work in each of our hearts – it is too precious to let the enemy destroy. Do not let the enemy rob us. Do not let the enemy strip away our honesty, muddy the waters and confuse us. Don't let him corrupt God's ministry.

We can all have a part in rebuilding the spiritual wall that keeps these corrupt things out. We can all have a revelation of what is true, and we can all stand on those convictions. We can all serve God with our whole heart.

Isn't it marvellous that God set it up that way: our worship, our service takes place in such a way that there is no power on earth or heaven that can stop it. No one can *stop* us from loving, from caring about souls, from adoring our God, from knowing our Saviour.

What the enemy can do is try to disrupt the part of our fellowship that takes place in more temporal ways, the part of our service that is manifest physically and emotionally. And if he can thoroughly discourage that, he knows that he can begin to chip away at our hearts, our revelations, our convictions, our beliefs.

Satan isn't content to just hurt our bodies and minds, because he knows that, while precious, they are temporary. He wants to destroy our souls.

There are many types of abuse. Experts and lawmakers and psychologists are beginning to understand emotional/psychological abuse better and better. As a result, they are addressing it in more direct and proactive ways: in workplaces, schools, government, etc. It can be difficult to understand, identify and eliminate. While it is not as immediately disgusting as sexual abuse, or as

visible as physical abuse, it can be just as severe and have many of the same consequences for victims. It can also be fatal.

We shouldn't be this far behind on these issues. After all, we are not just expected to abide by the laws of the land, or of common decency. We are expected to live even higher than that, and live according to the law of love and kindness.

We have heard of other staffs implementing codes of conduct concerning Child Sexual Abuse. Our staff has not done so, and it should.

I am also attempting to draft a code of conduct for coworker relationships. I fear that many other workers, including our overseers, will be resistant to implement such a thing. I wish that the scriptural guidelines we have would be enough; they *should* be enough. But maybe we need to be a little more specific about what is and is not appropriate behaviour. The code would be used:

1. To help workers identify and recognize when inappropriate behaviour occurs with a coworker. To help them discuss the behaviour in a productive way, with the hopes of abuse being prevented. In the case of severe and/or repeated violations of this code, it would assist in decisions being made to prevent further abuse and to take the necessary steps to protect vulnerable parties. (This may mean the abusive worker is asked to step down from the work and/or receive counselling.)

2. To help workers recognize their own behaviour and work toward being a healthier, safer companion. (Behaviour is often learned, and could be a product of how this worker was treated when they were younger. That does not make it appropriate. It is the responsibility of the worker to recognize abusive behaviour and to make every effort to not be abusive.)

May God's grace and love guide us as we go forward.

Yours in Him,

Alanna

Note: This letter is written to the friends in fields where I have laboured. I apologize for any email addresses from these fields that got missed. These include: Saint John, NB; Eastern Townships and Québec, QC; Western Newfoundland and Cape Breton, NS; Miramichi, NB; Moncton, NB. In my heart, I was addressing the friends specifically in these areas. I appreciate all of God's people. All are very precious in God's eyes and deserve to know the truth.