

Open letter from a professing man in Alberta

Jun 12

From: Jonathan McLernon

Date: June 11, 2023 at 6:00:23 AM MST

To: Michael Hasset [email redacted]

Subject: In Alberta, the silence is deafening.

Michael,

More than 2 and a half months since I wrote an open letter to workers and elders, including yourself, we have heard nothing further, after an initial brief reply. Perhaps there are letters going out and I'm simply not on the list. But if this is the case, I imagine this is the case for many of our friends in this province.

And so, I'm going to speak very plainly, because it seems that gentle words do not evoke a meaningful response. And, I'm going to bcc this email to as many people as possible (100+). Some will appreciate these words, some will be angered by them. Some will correct me if they feel that I have misspoken.

While I'm the one writing, rest assured that these words do not come from me alone.

Week after week, as allegations continue to pour out, we in this province are met with deafening silence. And it is not only this province.

Deafening silence from those who are in trusted positions of authority. Maybe there are covert meetings happening in secret with privileged elders, but for the average person, we are hearing NOTHING from those who we thought were trusted with responsibility and oversight and "care for the flock".

Sure, we have heard a few letters written with a few platitudes and verses, but absolutely nothing of substance that acknowledges the depth of the cruelty and betrayal that has been

running through this fellowship for decades that has affected hundreds, if not thousands of victims.

Where are the "fruits meet unto repentance"? Where is the Godly sorrow? Where is the righteous anger?

Rape. Sexual Abuse. Grooming. Child rape. Child sexual abuse. Abuse of authority to prey on women and children in particular. These are among the most EVIL and HEINOUS crimes that a person could ever commit.

These are crimes that damage a person for life.

To write what amounts to "we are all hurting from these things", for the victims of these cruel crimes, is the most indignifying slap in the face, to equate the pain of a damaged reputation, with the pain of being physically violated and abused.

If there was ever a time for leadership, this would be the time, and yet in the face of a real crisis, our "leadership" hides in what many are perceiving to be cowardly silence for weeks on end, while more and more victims come forward. It leads us to wonder if those in positions of authority are wishing that things are ignored long enough so that they will disappear, like in the "old days".

Let me be clear, that will NEVER happen again.

The conversations ARE happening. They are happening everywhere EXCEPT between workers and friends in this part of the world, it seems. Among MANY of us "ordinary" friends and we are going to sources outside the fellowship because those are the people who have often been hurt the most, silenced and even excommunicated for the crime of speaking out. They're the ones angry and hurt enough to speak loudly, no longer fearing retribution, and we are learning more and more about the depth of corruption and betrayal that has been plaguing this fellowship for decades.

Now the stories are in the light for ALL to see. And every single person in a position of authority who has been engaged in criminal activity is having their crimes brought to light, including the ones who have for years and decades, swept things under the rug.

I have been warned by others that if I speak up too bluntly, I may find myself "excommunicated".

And, when I heard that, I first thought "Probably not very likely". But, I also thought to myself "excommunicated for what?" For taking a vocal stand against child sexual abuse and the complicit coverups within this fellowship?

Looking back, I remember hearing whispers, even as a child, decades earlier, and being told that we don't speak about these things because it might upset the faith of others.

Alberta in particular, has been the place of many excommunications in the past, which in light of this current state, are absolutely trivial and rooted largely in religious legalism, and when faced with true criminal behaviour, from people in high places, the only time serious action is taken is when people shout so loudly they can't be ignored, or law enforcement becomes involved.

Regardless of the consequences of my speaking out, what cannot be taken from me is the foundation of my faith, which is rooted in Christ. Not in an institution established by men.

A very simple question to ask is "Where would we find Jesus?"

Would he be dining with workers of high status, would he be engaged in secretive conversations among a privileged few, aiding them to retain their positions of authority before men?

Jesus RAILED against religious hypocrisy. Silence IS being complicit, enabling and allowing abuse to continue.

In Alberta, is there a worker's code of conduct? Or one being developed? How about a child safe policy?

If they are, why are we hearing NOTHING? Why are we who are parents not being consulted?

Let's be clear. We know these policies will NOT change the heart of a predator, especially one that is incapable of empathy or compassion for their victims.

But, at least what it WILL do is it will allow those who are or have been victims, and those who could be potential future victims to KNOW what is and what isn't appropriate, and to know if they have been victims.

What about steps to take when a crime has been committed? What should victims do and where should they go?

Why are we not being alerted to potential predators and criminals in our midst? How are we to keep our children safe? (Yes, we ARE finding out this information, but NONE is coming from our "leaders")

The appalling lack of TRANSPARENCY continues, and there is NO good justification for this. Time and time again we have seen predators protected and moved around, and victims silenced, shamed, ignored or worse kicked out for being "troublemakers".

If we were to rely on our overseers, or the workers in our field to communicate to us all that has come to light in the last 3 months, we would know virtually nothing. We would still be in the dark.

Is it any wonder that any semblance of confidence we once had in our ministry as "led by the Spirit of God" has been reduced to almost nothing? Lack of transparency and open communication is a continued betrayal of our trust in "oversight" to help to keep our fellowship safe.

Conventions. Are they just going to carry on as normal, and we pretend that none of this has happened? How many abuses have been carried out at preps and convention grounds? Are there going to be precautions or safeguards put in place? If so, what are they?

My own (controversial) opinion is that conventions should be cancelled this year, with all of this hanging overhead.

It is abundantly clear that a problem of this magnitude cannot be solved within our fellowship in its current state. And, so we wonder, where do we go from here?

And right now, to be honest, I'm not really sure, because I don't know how serious those in leadership positions in our ministry are about creating REAL change.

Maybe a more fundamental question is: "How do we obtain salvation?"

It does not come from an institution established by men that is rooted in religious legalism, blatant hypocrisy, and complicit in hiding criminal behaviour. It does not come from men who behave like cowards that are more concerned with appearances than Godly righteousness. The Pharisees were the ones who Jesus called "whited sepulchres full of dead men's bones".

And in this trying time, one of the positives that has come from all of this terrible turmoil has been for me to ask "What is my faith in?"

Our salvation comes by the grace of God, through JESUS who is THE Way, THE Truth and THE Life.

Where does our Ministry go from here? Is it even possible to restore trust?

At the very least, the absolute first place to start would be a place of DEEP sorrow, humility and genuine REPENTANCE.

And because I don't believe I should only speak about the problems without offering some kind of solution or assistance, here is an example of a statement I would make to our province if I was in the shoes of an overseer:

To our dear friends and servants in this fellowship and more importantly, the deeply wounded ones who have departed this fellowship because of the trauma they have endured,

God has made it abundantly clear that it is well past the time we must address the shameful open secret that has plagued our fellowship and ministry for decades: that of sexual abuse and in particular, of child sexual abuse.

There is no easy way to discuss such a sensitive topic that is filled with pain, sorrow, shame and guilt.

*But it is this very reticence to **openly and frankly address this reprehensible evil** that finds us in this very distressing situation we are in today where friends, family and fellowship are being torn apart as the true magnitude of this evil within our fellowship comes to light.*

*It is abundantly clear that **efforts to address this in the past have been woefully inadequate** as evidenced by the outpouring of angry, painful and traumatic stories that have come to light following the investigations into the lengthy and horrific crimes committed by disgraced former overseers, workers, elders and friends, who have terribly abused their position of influence and authority to commit the most heinous of crimes.*

For far too long, these situations have been swept under the rug or hidden in the shadows for fear of what might happen if they were to come to light. Hushed conversations, secretive letters, communication only for the privileged few.

Victims of these crimes not only had to suffer the deep trauma of being sexually abused, but also the galling indignity of being disbelieved, shamed or even blamed for what transpired and in some cases even looked down upon as they angrily departed the fellowship.

We who remain in positions of responsibility in this ministry find ourselves overwhelmed as we are wrestling with the deepest of sorrow, guilt and shame for how we have failed our most precious friends and the most vulnerable among us, our children.

And so this letter marks a beginning and an end. We MUST begin an era of unprecedented transparency within this fellowship and ministry.

We recognize that every relationship within this fellowship is built on a foundation of trust, and where there is no trust, there is no fellowship.

If we are ever going to be able to restore the trust of our friends, our workers, and those who may want to be a part of this fellowship in future days, we must be absolutely united and unwavering in our commitment to taking every measure possible to ensure that the abuse of decades past can NEVER happen again.

*Please understand that we are human and we may never be able to entirely eradicate this evil, as there will always be those with evil in their heart that seek to prey on trusting, kind, God-fearing souls, but we will take every measure possible to ensure that **never again** will these crimes go unreported. **Never again** will we allow these crimes to be swept under the rug.*

While we do not yet know every step forward, we want to provide you with the strongest possible reassurance that we are committed to putting safeguards and transparency in place in such a way that our friends can begin to feel safe again with our fellowship and ministry, and will KNOW how to recognize abuse, and WHAT steps to take to ensure that the cycle CANNOT continue.

We write this with the utmost of humility, and we pray that you will be able to forgive this ministry for our terrible failures both in recent times and decades past, and plead that we will again be able to be united in fellowship that we may be able to turn our hearts again to that which is most important, our salvation that is rooted in CHRIST.

I wrote this a couple of months ago but didn't send it your way because I was waiting to see what the communication might be as this all played out. I didn't anticipate almost total silence.

There is so much more that could be said, and there are many scriptural references that could be included, but instead, I will link a letter written by a very good friend of mine, Daniel, which was sent out to all of the N. American overseers, as there will be many friends who have not, as yet, read [this exceptionally well-written letter](#), so in the event that this email is forwarded on to them, they would benefit from reading it,

Lastly, a part of me wants to write "I'm sorry" for the blunt nature of my words. But, I'm not sorry for that. I'm sorry for all of the victims who have suffered unimaginable pain at the hands of heartless predators, enabled by an institution that refused to take them seriously.

And I'm sorry for any times in the past that I failed to speak up, whether due to fear, or ignorance, I won't remain silent anymore,

Jonathan

PS – For anyone reading this, feel free to share or forward it on if you feel it would be helpful for others to hear