

From: Brent Trask <btrask@transformcma.ca>

Subject: Re: In Search Of Truth

Date: April 21, 2017 at 2:22:11 PM MDT

To: Barry Pendergast <barrypendergast@telus.net>

Cc: Patrick Nixon <patnixon@oxfordhouse.ca>, Jennifer Pendergast <jenniferpendergast@telus.net>, Tim Heather Beadle <tbeadle@transformcma.ca>

April 21, 2017

Dear Barry and Jennifer,

As promised, please find below my response to your request for advice related to the situation you shared with me in your email of April 9th related to your participation at First Alliance.

First of all, let me share that the church coach for First Alliance, Rev Tim Beadle, has kept me apprised to this situation since you first contacted the National Ministry Centre last summer. Tim has kept me informed throughout this past year as we saw a process develop and move towards an attempt at reconciliation. I have no doubt that you have been hurt by the treatment at the hands of folks at FAC, and that FAC people (Pastors and lay leaders) could and should have responded better along the way - both in means, process and timing. For that, I apologize on behalf of the greater Body of Christ as this is not commensurate with our mutual expectations of loving and respectful community that Jesus bled and died for. Further, it would also be my read that the stimulus that caused the hurt and offence is not sufficient to warrant the posture and pathway I see you embracing.

We do agree with all parties involved that this process has taken far too long in developing and this has only added to the angst associated with your initial upset at the church.

That being said, we believe the church has been sincere in their posture in understanding your concerns and has taken them seriously in looking into the claim that you have suffered 'spiritual abuse' at the hands of lay volunteer leaders in the marriage enrichment ministry you were formerly part of. Church leadership has shared with me an intention to look at their leadership policies in the coming days as well.

In my understanding, the use of the term 'abuse' (in whatever situation it is ascribed) implies someone has used their position of authority to willfully harm another person knowingly and with the intent to take advantage of that person for their own benefit or personal gain.

After dialoguing with church leaders at First Alliance, I would support their position, that while a breakdown in relationship occurred between you and the Buschman's, there is no evidence that they ever held such a motive toward you that should rightly be described as 'abuse'. They have been interviewed by both Pastors and Elders and are deeply disturbed that they would be accused in such a manner.

This position in no way ignores nor downplays the hurt that you have suffered in receiving decisions made that now place you on the outside of a ministry you have served in for years in other organizations.

I am aware that you recently met with Elders and the Buschman's and during that meeting Ron Bushman expressed, what to my understanding I would describe as, a

sincere and complete apology for the offense, and resulting pain thereof, caused to you. I am disturbed however, in light of biblical teaching, that I have been informed that you did not receive and appropriately respond to this sincere apology. Is this true? If so, and as apologies usually lead to a path of reconciliation, and since you haven't accepted this apology made to you, there is little to be done following your decision in this regard.

As to your request for advice: I am not in support of advising you or the church to seek outside assistance for further investigation with view to some arbitrated settlement in this regard. In my opinion, the next step should be that of each party giving and receiving grace to one another in order to move forward into the future with charity, unity and mutual release. Since your suggestion though is to seek settlement via further investigation and arbitration, I am asking you to declare what your intentions are as an outcome to this situation. What is to be gained for all this further effort? What exactly are you looking for in order to put this issue behind for all parties involved?

My understanding is that you have experienced painful relationships with past churches and organizations wherein you have also submitted claims of spiritual abuse. Is this true? Further, my understanding is that in one case you proceeded with legal action against your former church leadership. Is this true?

If so, it would appear to me that the pain you are currently experiencing might be linked and even amplified by the pain you have suffered in the past. Is it possible that your historical context is complicating the gravity of the circumstances at hand at First Alliance?

I commend that you continue in relationship with First Alliance Church, seem content, regularly attend worship, and are involved in children's ministry and a photo ministry as well. I also note you have partnered with Shirley Thiessen in the production of ministry tool (grief video) related to the tragic death of your son in past years. These are all positive signs that you value your church family and desire to reconcile the offenses you have experienced.

It is my prayer and advice that you adopt a posture of discernment in listening to God's Spirit to the point of understanding why you were unable to accept the apology made to you. Furthermore, what will it now take for you to accept that apology, so that the inner healing you need can be found in the sufficiency of Jesus, through his Spirit's tender work in your life in the coming days.

Respectfully,

Rev Brent Trask
District Superintendent – Western Canadian District

c.c. Rev. Tim Beadle – District Church Coach

Brent Trask

Superintendent
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Calgary, AB T3H 0N9

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On Apr 9, 2017, at 3:14 PM, Barry Pendergast <barrypendergast@telus.net> wrote:

Barry & Jennifer Pendergast, 9203-29 th Street SW., Calgary, Ab, T2V 4V1

tel: 403-281- 4876

Sent to Pastor Brent Trask, District Superintendent C&MA btrask@transformcma.ca.

A paper copy to be hand delivered 10th April 2017

333-30 Springborough Blvd. SW

Calgary AB T3H 0N9

9 April 2017

Without Prejudice

Dear Pastor Trask

We write to you for advice on a matter of deep concern and distress. Its concerns the way in which we were expelled without warning or cause from the Marriage Matters Ministry on 27th May 2016 by Ron & Teresa Buschman the team leaders acting under the authority of Pastor Les Bon-Bernard, the Pastor responsible for the Family Life Ministry at First Alliance Church. We first shared this heartbreaking experience in writing and discussions with Melodie Bissell, President and CEO of Plan to Protect in late May 2016, then on Melodie's recommendation shortly after with Pastor Tim Beadle from your office. Pastor Beadle affirmed in writing the pain he had witnessed in our private discussions with him on June 10th 2016.

Sadly the events of the 27th May 2016 were not the first time Ron Buschman had abused the power of his position over those entrusted to his care. The first time occurred in January 2015 when he refused to accept that confidential information was being freely given out by a mentoring couple. At that time he abused us both in emails and verbally. He acted in total violation of the spirit and principles of the First Alliance Staff Covenant. Subsequently he failed to implement a confidentiality policy and we witnessed another sharing occurring later in the year due to the frustrations of the mentoring couple having to deal again with a 'difficult' couple.

As we did then we now ask you to investigate our serious allegations that well documented spiritually abusive tactics, the misuse of scripture and bearing of false and other forms of abuse that were carried out against us on multiple occasions by First Alliance Church staff, members of the Elder Board and others in the period from January 2015 to the current day. These happening in direct violation of biblical principals, C&MA & First Alliance policy and staff covenant documents.

We seek to show these actions have been deliberate acts that have caused us deep spiritual, emotional, psychological pain, deep distress and likely permanent wounding in

our desire to more follow Christ in everything we do.

Abuse that has destroyed our ability to use our God given skills, extensive gifts and over eighteen years of experience, service and standing in the international Alpha Relational and Family Ministry. Gifts that could have been used to train many others and used both inside and outside the church walls to reach many couples who desperately need to hear God's word on love, especially those who are unmarried.

Only recently did Dave Orr Chairman of the Board of Elders admit on several occasions First Alliance Church had no policy or process to deal with serious conflict. Certainly no evidence the principles of Mathew 18:15 are in use. We would add our painful experiences will clearly also show no safe methods for reporting leaders who use the power of their position to force their abusive demands on those entrusted to their care. A key ingredient in the definition of spiritual abuse as defined by David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen in their book called The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse. A number of other books deal with the same identifying factors.

Our recent experience suggests the First Alliance Elder Board also seems to be driven more by fear or unrealistic expectations of the pastors than sound judgement based on a proper understanding of their role as leaders and the legal responsibility they bear as officers of the organization. What they have failed to understand is that having the title Pastor is meaningless unless the leader speak and act in God's truth.

Matters at this level of seriousness should have been shared at an Elder Board level at the outset in June 2016, We understand some details were shared by Pastor Paton three months later at an elder board meeting. What details were shared is unknown. Even then no action appears to have been taken and matters were left in Pastor Les Bon-Bernard's hands to deal with.

In any case we need to note we did share many of our concerns and the way we had been progressively isolated from ministry activities directly with Pastor James Paton on January 29th 2016. He did promise to get back to us in about five weeks, but despite verbal and written requests we heard nothing but a verbal message to be patient.

From the beginning we were fortunate to have Pat Nixon as our witness and spiritual advisor to share in all communications including attending meetings with us on five painful occasions. It would have been impossible to withstand this painful journey without Pat at our side. Like many others we would have left seriously wounded.

We collectively tried to have all discussions held in an open and transparent manner but were frustrated by delays and a complete denial of our allegations, on multiple occasions by Pastor Bon-Bernard. His whole manner was one without care, sensitivity or the compassion expected of all leaders in the Christian church in a search for truthful and honest discussion. Repeated requests for an independent investigation by experienced and skilled Christians were refused multiple times. More recently similar requests to the Elder Board representatives were also declined.

In November 2016 Pastor Les Bon Bernard finally stepped down from direct involvement because he agreed with Pat Nixon and ourselves he was in a conflicted position. A position we challenged a number of times including in our initial discussions with Pastor Beadle.

We understand our concerns were discussed by Pastor Bon-Bernard and the Chairman of the Elders Dave Orr. Subsequently Elder Dr Brent Kinnie was appointed in late November 2016 to investigate these matters. Earlier on the 22nd November 2016 we emailed a sixteen page detailed submission of our testimony outlining our allegations to Elder Orr. Much later he would claim he did not receive it. A copy was subsequently sent to Elder Kinnie in early December 2016 and a request to advise us on how to move forward was largely ignored. Again several emails from Pat Nixon and ourselves to Elder Kinnie sharing our concerns on the way he was handling the process were again ignored.

Now ten months later involved in a process that we believe was designed to deliberately stall, frustrate and hide the truth. A process which has further victimized us and added greatly to our pain. A number of respected witnesses including Melodie Bissell, Pat Nixon, our respective doctors, counsellors and four others will attest to the stress affecting our emotional, spiritual and physical health caused by an event in late May 2016 when we were expelled without warning, witnesses, evidence and grave misuse of scripture by Ron & Teresa Buschman, the Marriage Matters Ministry Leaders.

Only on the 8th March 2017 at a meeting arranged by Elder Kinnie with Elder Dave Orr present did we hear a completely different, unsupported and we allege totally fabricated version of what had transpired on 27th May 2016. A version that denied any harm had been done rather we had apparently asked to retire from the ministry to devote more time to other ministry activities. Rather than the use of Matthew 18:15 as a basis to expel us the Buschman claimed they used an unspecified part of Matthew 5. The Buschmans also claimed they were going to publicly thank us at a Couple Cafe evening on June 10th for our contribution to the ministry but subsequently reversed that decision when they heard a claim been made against them.

How the Buschmans had heard of the claim against them in late May 2016 when complete confidentiality was promised by Pastor Beadle and Pastor Bon-Bernard ahead of our initial meeting with Tim on June 10 2016 at our house is unknown.

We believe this version of the 27th May 2016 meeting was one that Pastor Les Bon-Bernard and other First Alliance leaders had been aware of for many months yet had deliberately chosen not to share or disclose.

The way Elders Kinnie and Orr handled 8th March 2017 meeting demonstrated in our mind a complete lack of the wisdom, knowledge, judgement or skills required in challenging situations like this.

The delay and mismanagement of an Elder led process from December 2016 and on yet again exposed us to further hurt and trauma. A complete opposite to policies clearly outlined and defined that require pastors and leaders to be first and foremost servant leaders to protect and lovingly nurture the sheep under their command.

After four months of meetings and exchange of correspondence a further meeting was held at our house on 4th April 2017 with Pat Nixon, Elders Orr and Kinnie. Out of hand the Elders dismissed our claims and the substantial evidence offered including a critical phone recording showing how Ron Buschman had shown his intentions well ahead of the 27th May 2016 decision in conversation with Elaine Young, National Director of Alpha Family Ministry in early May 2016. This alone would cause a huge gulf in the more than 19 years of friendship and professional relationship between us and Elaine.

The Elders claimed it was all a matter of misunderstanding and miscommunication. Seemingly feeling their responsibility was to protect pastoral and other leaders in all circumstances and not hear or fairly investigate legitimate evidence of abuse and deliberate actions that were designed to hurt our reputation in the church and the Christian community.

Again we repeat in direct violation to established and published C&MA and First Alliance policies on staff and volunteer roles. The Elders could not confirm any compliance by staff named with the FAC Staff Covenant document.

Quite simply there is no middle ground on this. Either we have lied about what transpired on 27th May 2016 and earlier, perhaps concocted an elaborate and imaginative plan with multiple witnesses and evidence. But for what purpose would we do that? Our relationships with all other parts of the church and Christian community on the outside are good. In the alternative did senior pastors, team leaders and Elders lie to cover up their malicious acts. If the latter is true then multiple parts of Biblical leadership requirements have been broken and appropriate counselling and disciplinary action is required.

We now respectfully ask and pray for you to hold an early enquiry headed by one or more unbiased, neutral and mature Christians with the experience and reputation to hear our allegations and call witnesses to testify. Currently eight people including Melodie Bissell, Pat Nixon, two doctors and two councillors are willing to testify that we suffered as we claimed by the actions of First Alliance staff and subsequent lack of action by the Elders involved. Equally to review our own behaviour and whether we could have acted differently to prevent the repeated abuse. Then to fairly determine if abuse has happened, whether it is more widespread than we claim, whether discipline is needed and what steps, changes in leadership structure, safeguards and education are needed to prevent this kind of abuse happening again.

Perhaps to recommend that this subject be preached on and educational workshops held to inform all members and attendees. The aim to develop a C&MA policy that

might be shown as a model to other churches to follow.

A few months ago valued contacts at Ambrose University recommended a mature Christian with experience in matters of investigating matters such as these. Somebody who would be unbiased and not part of the Calgary Christian establishment. That person is Dr. Ken Thiessen of Power Of One based in Regina. We have made a preliminary contact with him and he has agreed to have you call him if you consider it useful to see where he might help resolve our allegations and concerns in a Godly manner.

**Dr. Ken Thiessen ken@powerofoneconsulting.ca Power of One Consulting
305 1220 Blackfoot Drive, Regina, SK S4S 6T2**

Pat Nixon and ourselves would also be happy to make ourselves available to meet at the earliest opportunity to discuss this matter further. Copies of all relevant emails, meeting records and other documents can be supplied on request.

We would appreciate your immediate confirmation this email has been received.

Your Brother and Sister in Christ
Blessings

Barry & Jennifer Pendergast

Copy Pat Nixon