

2022-03-24

"Hi Marci,

The time has come for us to lay out to you what has been on our hearts for awhile now. This email will serve as our explanation of why we do not wish to host meetings in our home, and to no longer attend meetings of any sort.

This decision has been made through a very difficult time, in which counsel has been sought out from various friends and workers.

There are 3 things which have lead us to this point:

1. Systemic Abuses – Culture of Silence

While friends and workers seem to be very uncomfortable discussing this topic, it is perhaps the topic of most consequence with far reaching, lasting effects on people.

We strongly believe that being silent is equal to complicity.

We find that the longer we go on in this way, our values and expectations do not align with how the ministry has dealt with such matters. Quite frankly there appears to be a higher standard in general society on how these things are dealt with, which is very disappointing.

Specifically we are referring to matters of sexual abuse/ assaults, bullying, grooming, possession / distribution of child pornography.

None of these items listed above are heresy or speculative, and we recognize that no religious or any organization is exempt from these problems. However, the response to these matters by any organization is key to resolving systemic issues effecting real change. We find the ministry's response to such matters as extraordinarily inconsistent, and a culture of silence in the name of "unity" or "for the good of the kingdom" still prevails.

Consider the matter of Aaron Farough. I spoke at length with Merlin about our concerns in Feb 2021 shortly after I was interviewed by the RCMP, as the transgressions occurred under our roof. (among many other peoples roofs) I described to Merlin the nature of the investigation that we went under by the RCMP Integrated Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit based out of Surrey BC.

We were assured that Aaron had admitted his guilt to Merlin long before I was contacted by the RCMP, and he was advised / encouraged that he should simply plead guilty and move on with sentencing.

Clearly that has not happened, based on the publicly available court registry information, the case is going to trial in Courtenay (which means no admission of guilt by the charged party) and furthermore the trial has been the subject of numerous strategic delays by Aarons defense team.

<https://justice.gov.bc.ca/cso/eseach/criminal/partySearch.do>

Merlin to his credit acknowledged to us that he was sorry that this happened to us.

There has been zero accountability from Aaron to the people whose homes and testimony were put into question by the choices he made. And to our knowledge, no

accountability, outreach or restitution to the victims of this crime. This was not a "victimless crime" as I have heard various people from this way portray this as.

There has been no acknowledgement by anyone in the ministry of past wrongs and that this is a problem which must be addressed by change.

There was no outreach in our field by the ministry, where the transgressions occurred, for support or in particular checking in with families that had children in their home while Aaron was a guest. The fact that the RCMP were very concerned if we had minors living at home (our children) while Aaron was a guest, speaks to seriousness of the matter.

There was a letter given to Sunday elders, with the instructions only to be shared upon request. This does not instill confidence that our culture of silence is changing.

We were so hopeful for change when we heard the messaging at the previous years special meeting regarding child sexual abuse. We agreed between each other that we would give this time to see if positive change was imminent. Certainly we know that yes, a code of conduct was drafted and implemented, and a short awareness training course was/ is being completed as a requisite of being in the ministry, all positive steps, but not an indication of openness and willingness for things to change.

We find that when there is any discussion of such a heavy topic, whether it be with ministry or friends, the most common comments made are "the way is perfect, not the people". When we look back over 37 years at the limited circle of our acquaintances, just how many sexual misconduct incidents instigated by ministry and friends, that were whispered about, or dealt with by unexpected "field changes", swept under the rug or simply encouraged not to talk about, there is no denying there is a historical, systemic problem. While we completely understand that we all have the same potential to sin or for ugly human nature to rear its head, you cannot deny that being in the ministry does involve leadership and therefore a higher expectation of conduct.

We find that the when these cases are revealed the matter is often addressed by the ministry to the flock with a lot talk about forgiveness for the sinner, which we fully agree with.

However, we don't find that there is any or little spoken of empathy for the victim with little to no outreach for victim support, in fact we have seen some victims who have been shunned through out the years. Support, which is completely different from counselling, is given by a community and is part of the victims healing process.

We feel that we can no longer be a part of an organization that manages such issues in its current format. Substantial change within any organization cannot happen until there is openness and acknowledgment of change needed, and I suspect that our engrained intergenerational culture of silence and suffering will prevail. In good conscience we would never belong or wish to be associated with any organization that has this sort of record of covering up of abuses.

2. COVID – 19 Response

This matter is much more subjective. Throughout the last 2 years, everyone has had to adapt and change. It hasn't been easy for anyone.

We acknowledge that there are differences of opinions. However, the lack of support and innovation (ie change) was disheartening.

There is a lot of lament about getting back to the way things were. The world we live is in constant change, we trust that the spirit of God will always find a way to meet needs

no matter the circumstances. There seemed to be a general lack of trust in the flock to abide by and in God to provide for over this last couple of years. For those of us with compromised immune systems there seemed to be little compromise or consideration. We heard more than once the sentiment, that if we aren't afraid to die, then what are we afraid of? There seemed to be a lot of effort made to figure out the loopholes in any PHO orders for the sake of in person fellowship. This type of testimony does not agree with our values. While we understand the we abide by the "law of the lord" we do not see ourselves above any law. Had we applied this mind set to our places of work, we would not have a job.

3. Messaging

The messaging by the ministry has changed, as certainly evidenced by our most recent special meetings. There was little focus on the principles of Christs teachings; love, compassion, caring, kindness, inclusiveness, but rather a prevailing rhetoric of fear being shared as bread. It felt more like opinions rather than revelation. People are tired, its been a long 2 years. I would think messages of hope and compassion would be the prescription. The style of messaging is becoming more characteristic of a far right wing authoritarian evangelical version of Christianity. This is very evident when you look at some of the "friends" online testimony, which one presumes reflects the ministry. There is a lot of rhetoric shared about exclusivity and quite frankly hatred. We find this does not align with our values.

As such, consider this email our resignation. We do not wish to debate the above topics, this is simply a statement of our reasons.

We have not lost faith in God, gods grace, Christ teachings of love, kindness, inclusivity, and our salvation.

Rather we have lost confidence in the ministry.

We bear no ill will to any of the friends, nor wish to be a stumbling block to anyone.

We all must work out our own salvation in fear and trembling.

Please facilitate removing our contact information from all lists, etc.

We are also providing this letter to Ken and Louise Greives.

Regards,

Kerry & Jen Barth