

We are often asked about the situation involving Christian Aid Ministries, and the sexual abuse perpetrated by one of their missionaries. Our hearts are certainly grieved as we hear the stories of the victims and the missionaries involved. We as conservative Anabaptists acknowledge that we have often failed to protect the vulnerable among us. In response, we have decided to post a well-written article which was published in the SWORD AND TRUMPET. We post it with their permission. – Anabaptist Awareness

Christian Aid Ministries worker abuses dozens, CAM leadership implicated in coverup

Hans Mast

It is with a heavy heart that I write this. I know among conservative Anabaptists (CAs) there are incidents of sexual abuse that are covered up in ways that are inappropriate, but I had hoped I'd never run across a story of where the coverup would lead to enablement of further abuse.

However, I was concerned enough to write a column dedicated to the issue. In the Newslines column in the September 2017 issue, I gave two cautionary tales of the devastation wrought in conservative Christian ministries when abuse and inappropriate behavior were covered up instead of dealt with transparently and in submission to the governmental authorities.

In the case of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE), they covered up the adultery of one of their missionaries rather than sending him home according to their policies. This allowed him to rape or molest at least 23 missionary girls in Bangladesh (and an unknown number of Bangladeshis). When one of the victims came forward, they finally removed him from the mission field. However, they failed to let her parents, his US church, or the US authorities know about the abuse. This allowed him to resume his doctor's practice in the US and to abuse other American kids through his access as a doctor. My warning from that story was thus:

“More and more stories are emerging of this pattern of abuse and cover-up and further abuse among conservative evangelicals... As we know, we've faced similar problems in our conservative Anabaptist churches.

“The absolutely essential lesson of both of these stories is that we must take to heart the Bible's teaching that sin flourishes in darkness, in secrecy. By keeping this sin of abuse hidden (even if it was 'confessed' after being caught), it allowed the perpetrators to continue abusing people. We do not want to gossip about sin or engage in public shaming for its own sake, but sins of abuse need to be publicly acknowledged to provide accountability and to open the door for other victims to step forward. Far too often victims feel like they're the only ones and are scared to come forward. However, in both these cases [ABWE and IBLP], as soon as something was said publicly, the floodgates were opened with hundreds of people coming forward to tell their stories. This is something that doesn't happen if leadership keeps these matters private.

“It is also important that church and ministry leaders work with government authorities to report abuse. We are called to obey governmental authorities as they seek to punish the bad and protect the good. And the government has many commonsense protections in place to keep sex offenders from re-offending and damaging more victims, which is for

the protection of the offender's soul, even if he or she has repented. Furthermore, while we forgive and seek to restore someone who has sinned, it is not our place to make the choice whether the law will show them justice or mercy.

Sadly that warning came too late for Christian Aid Ministries. The same ABWE-scenario had already played out in 2011 and the fruits were revealed in 2019.

Jeriah Mast was a missionary worker for CAM and other CA missions in Haiti. He was caught sexually abusing little boys around 2010-2011 (and perhaps even before that). After "repentance" and with the knowledge of the highest levels of CAM executive leadership, was allowed to continue working for CAM, including being put in charge of the CAM schools in Haiti, having unsupervised access to little boys. And he continued raping them.

Some have cast the CAM leadership's actions in 2011 as one of forgiveness gone awry. This is not a case of too much mercy. The most loving thing for Jeriah would have been to remove him from situations of temptation. The Bible calls us to literally flee temptation, but CAM failed to help him do that. It was unloving toward Jeriah that he was put back into the incredibly tempting situation of being surrounded by potential victims. These Haitian victims were far more vulnerable than even his victims from his US community, due to cultural barriers, Jeriah's position of authority, his charisma, and due to their poverty, revealed by the way he used CAM funds to bribe them into silence.

Forgiveness never requires resistance against governmental authorities by failing to report. It also never requires restoration without a plan to provide accountability to make re-offense far more difficult for the offender. Sadly in this case, both of these things were done.

Apparently, the board did not know, but the top leadership of CAM knew

News of this did not start with a statement from CAM. Instead, it was leaked because some Haitian victims finally had the courage to report him to Haitian police. As a result, Jeriah knew in time to flee Haiti via the Dominican Republic, returning to his home in Ohio.

Former-CA sexual abuse survivor, counselor, and victims' advocate Trudy Metzger flew to Haiti and interviewed CA missions leaders and victims. She posted the news on her blog Splash4Ripples.com—where it spread like wildfire through the CA community—and forwarded a more indepth account to the FBI.

After all this was in the open, Jeriah finally confessed to local Ohio police his US-based crimes. It appears Jeriah was not planning to confess his Haiti crimes until police (with the FBI present) asked him about them. Under the PROTECT Act of 2003, it is a federal crime to abuse minors in other countries.

At first CAM stonewalled the revelations of the abuse. They issued a "lawyered up" statement that admitted nothing and deflected. After a huge outcry from the CA community, the board stepped in and issued a much more transparent statement saying that they had not known about the abuse and that two of the top leaders who knew have been placed on administrative leave pending the results of an internal investigation.

On July 3rd, Jeriah was indicted in Ohio court for his domestic crimes and pled not guilty.

There are six comments I would like to make in response to all of this.

First, some have criticized Trudy Metzger for her part in publicizing this scandal after it became public in the Haiti courts. This is misplaced criticism. CAM refused to be transparent, even *after* Metzger informed the CA public. CAM was not doing the right thing before the CA community's pressure, not to mention covering it up 2011-2019. While I might disagree with a few of the ways she is doing things, they are specks of sawdust compared to the giant redwood in the eyes of the CA community. We dare not let reasonable disagreement on a few minor points distract us from appreciation of her much-needed actions overall. I have been blessed by her balanced compassion for victims and perpetrator. She does not come across as some have tried to portray her. Everything that I have seen of her writing on this particular incident has been very balanced, compassionate, and meticulously sourced. It does not reflect well on us as a CA community to be defensive, attacking the messenger in an instance of our clear wrongdoing. If we will not take care of our own problems the way Christ has commanded, God will ensure that others take care of it. Thus we've lost the right to complain that if the messenger did not do things exactly as we would have preferred.

Secondly, I urge CAM to hire an organization like GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment) or a similar independent organization to conduct a full investigation of all allegations of abuse. There are allegations that go beyond Jeriah and it is important that CAM donors have their confidence restored by external accountability. We much be assured that donated funds are not being used to further cover up abuse.

Third, I urge CAM and all CA organizations to study the policies of ABWE (<http://bit.ly/ABWE-Children>) and other similar organizations to ensure that this never happens again. This is a two part process of writing the policies and then making sure they're well understood by all staff and actually implemented. The History section of ABWE's website exemplifies a humble, repentant attitude toward their tragic history. By all appearances, ABWE learned their lesson, repented, and is now stronger than ever in building the Kingdom.

Fourth, let's consider the downsides of this scandal. Some believe we must choose either transparency for CAM or effectiveness for CAM in all the good they're doing around the world. This is a false dichotomy. Like Israel at Ai, CAM cannot be effective with hidden sin. While we mourn the devastation of this, we also recognize that God is redeeming this for his purposes. I know of at least one CA mission organization that is already working on a sexual abuse policy. This is the first step in making sure our sometimes shameful past of hiding these things does not continue. As a bridge organization integral to all parts of the CA world, CAM is uniquely positioned to tell a powerful story of the necessity of a change in this sinful aspect of our culture. We need courageous men and women of God to stand up and say, "Enough! This tendency of our culture in the past is often motivated by pride and fear, not by Jesus. We will do differently." (Partially inspired by "Why the Blow-up Over CAM's Failure to Report Sex Crimes Needed to Happen" by Lucinda J. Miller <http://bit.ly/NecessaryPublicity>)

Fifth, I urge parents to follow my mother's example of speaking to children about abuse. This can be done in age-appropriate ways. I recall clearly being taught from the age of 2-4 years old that if anyone ever touched my "private parts" (as my parents referred to them) that I should quickly tell them because that wasn't allowed. Building a culture of awareness ensures that predators get caught as quickly as possible before they can do further damage. This culture also serves as a deterrent to abuse in the first place, if potential offenders know they are likely to be quickly caught. If shame prevents us from talking and teaching about this, we will create space ripe for abuse, sexual sins, and unbiblical thinking about sex.

Finally, I ask you to consider the following letter from Dan Ziegler and take it to heart. Dan is a former CA missionary with *Blue Ridge* in Haiti and the former president of *Rosedale Bible College*. (For what it's worth, he is more conservative than *Rosedale* is currently.) His compassionate and wise insight on this issue is valuable.

Sources: *Splash4Ripples.com* by Trudy Metzger, *Wooster Daily Record*, Christian Aid Ministries, Travel.State.Gov

A Way Forward Dan Ziegler

My scope of understanding is quite limited, but these three core facts appear to be true:

1) Jeriah Mast systematically sexually abused perhaps dozens of boys over a 20-year period in both the United States (as a member of a conservative Anabaptist church community) and Haiti (while a missionary for CAM & Life Literature). Many victims have come forth, and Jeriah has allegedly confessed to these things.

2) While the bulk of the activity came out in May 2019, in an [interrogation by a] pastor in Haiti, some of Jeriah's previous pedophilic actions were known to those in leadership for years—including American and Haitian pastors, CAM & Life Literature leaders, and presumably leaders in his church community and some family members.

3) Despite multiple episodes of "repentance" over the years (up until recently), Jeriah showed no ability to overcome his darkest impulses, and his action showed no meaningful understanding of the damage he was inflicting on the lives of his victims, their families, and the cause of Christ.

These tragic and far-reaching facts have rocked the Conservative Anabaptist and Mission worlds—including mine—we are part of this community and have served in Haiti in a conservative Anabaptist mission a total of five years, in part during the time while Jeriah was actively victimizing Haitian boys. We personally know many of those involved in this tragedy—both Haitians and Missionaries alike. Our hearts are broken and, with so many others, we are both angered and grieved! So, the question is, in the face of such a great wrong, "What should happen now? How do we, as a community of faith, move forward from here?" We know that evil must not triumph where the cause of Christ is concerned.

As Christians we look to the values of Justice and Grace for our answers and—while these values are sometimes found in tension with each other—we recognize that God is a God of both, and we must be a people of both. Where Justice and Grace find harmony is in the example of Christ, who calls us to a higher plane of justice. Instead of retributive justice (an eye for an eye) we are to strive for restorative justice (grace-filled justice that brings new life). In fact, we rely on it for our salvation—"for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." So, what does restorative justice demand in this situation?

First, and most importantly, for the victims and their families, **justice** demands that Jeriah face the international legal consequences for his crimes against children. **Restoration** demands that these boys and their families be cared for spiritually, psychologically, and materially by the community that Jeriah was a part of—family, churches and institutions must sacrificially join forces in this effort—in the hopes of restoring their dignity and helping them heal as dearly loved children of God.

Second, "to whom much is given, much is required." **Justice** demands that those in church and mission leadership who previously (before May) knew of Jeriah's wrongs, especially those who could have hindered his access to the children of Haiti, admit their failure to adequately protect the "least of these," apologize for their negligence, and publicly recognize the severe harm to individuals and their institutions that their lapse in judgement has brought about. Trust has been broken, and those who could have stopped Jeriah's reappointment to Haiti (including board members) need to step aside in order to help their missions regain trust and rebuild the work for Christ they have been called to do. I don't say this lightly—many of these brothers have honorably given their lives to mission work, and many are my friends. **Restoration** requires that we in the Conservative Anabaptist Mission and Church community repent of the prideful and self-preserving culture that has allowed this evil to go unchecked in our midst in this situation and elsewhere, and together build a system of transparency, accountability, and procedural integrity to prevent this kind of thing from ever happening again! Restoration also demands that those leaders (and their families) who have been shamed and broken by this calamity find forgiveness, healing, and care in family of God, and also that those institutions that have been tainted be given the opportunity to meet their legal and moral obligations, and with whatever solvency remains, re-earn their constituents trust and with the community's oversight and God's help fully give themselves once again to the work of Jesus.

Third, **justice** requires that Jeriah, once broken and repentant, pay the price for his crimes of violence, vulgarity, and selfish power against these innocents, and never be given unsupervised access to children again as long as he lives (even his own children). This price will doubtless include confession, specific and personal apologies, a lengthy prison sentence, and restitution to victims. **Restoration** requires that Jeriah's life be spared, and ultimately that he too find forgiveness, treatment, and the opportunity for restoration into the community of faith as a redeemed child of God. Restoration also requires that his family, who are also his victims, be cared for and nurtured by the community. (I am not convinced that his life, as a pedophile-missionary who preyed on Haitian children, will be spared in the bedlam of a Haitian prison. Might he serve his Haitian time in an American prison?)

As shock has turned to anger in our community, I hear strong words of condemnation, with some folks calling for harsh and far-reaching punishment, and/or for withholding of funds from CAM or even for its dissolution. Bitterness and cynicism are on the rise within our ranks. I have children of my own, and I have served much of my life in ministry and mission leadership—I understand this anger. Others are silent, defensive, or advocate for "circling the wagons" to limit the damage. I understand this preservation instinct as well.

However, there comes a point, hopefully sooner rather than later, when with God's help this cascade of events turns from destructive to constructive. I don't believe we are there yet—and some important things have to be set in motion before this occurs. But we need to pray fervently together, that out of the ruins of the brokenness of this tragedy might emerge something true and God-breathed.

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Additional Reading:

Here is some additional reading I would recommend on the topic:

- “The Stranger Within” by Lucinda J. Miller on *The Dock* (a blog for teachers by FBEP’s Resource Group) - <http://bit.ly/StrangerWithinDock> - contains a great summary of how to create a healthy environment that responds correctly to sexual abuse and has a helpful list of resources for further learning
- “ChildLine” by Shari Zook on *The Dock* - <http://bit.ly/ChildLineDock> - talks about mandatory reporters and gives stories of dealing with governmental child protective services
- “Stop talking about ‘moral failure’” by Rosina Schmucker - <http://bit.ly/StopMoralFailure>
- “Guidelines for Teacher/Student Conduct” on *The Dock* - <http://bit.ly/GuidelinesDock> - template policy for Christian schools