Barry & Jennifer Pendergast Testimony 22 November 2016 (rev 7 January 17)

Barry & Jennifer Pendergast are seeking the wisdom and prayers from the Elder Board at First Alliance Church in how to proceed with a matter of deep concern. It concerns the creation of a safe atmosphere in which to talk about difficult issues of conflict and allegations of leadership abuse: how to develop a biblical process for investigating, applying necessary correction and resolution in a Christ like manner. How to have ongoing processes that ensures all leadership is properly monitored and carried out with the very highest standards of love, trust, honesty, transparency and above all God honouring.

Its appropriate to mention and commend the work that **Plan To Protect** started early in 2016 to focus on the difficult and challenging topic of spiritual abuse by authoritative and abusive church leaders. Of substantive importance is the spiritual, emotional and psychological harm that can be done to the victims. Barry & Jennifer Pendergast will say that the level of grief they have experienced is equivalent to losing a loved one. In this case also losing the ability to serve joyfully and in a ministry they are sure God gifted them for. **Plan To Protect** gave Barry and Jennifer a strong sense somebody of Christian faith and experience understood their plight.

Slides from Plan to Protect's Spiritual Abuse webinar presentation. See example #4 www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/plan_to_protect.pdf

In bringing these matters out for honest and transparent discussion Barry & Jennifer Pendergast sincerely pray they can collectively and sincerely work together with the FAC Leadership to resolve this particular issue to full restoration but more importantly develop healthy Christ centred leadership, team principles and procedures to avoid similar occurrences in the future. In that process Barry & Jennifer Pendergast are open to correction if they have erred in any way. However they believe they have a right to challenge the decision to expel them from the Marriage Matters ministry in May of this year.

On 9 September this year Barry & Jennifer Pendergast emailed Pastor Les Bon-Bernard with a message that included this passage

“that would allow us to safely share our testimony alleging spiritual abuse, misuse of important scriptural principles and the bearing of false witness against us in the Marriage Matters Ministry at First Alliance Church in Calgary. These matters happened between the Fall of 2014 and May 27th 2016”

Full email
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/request_independant_arbitrator_sept9.pdf

Very serious allegations but ones Barry & Jennifer Pendergast and their independent advisors and councillors believe are valid and require early investigation and intervention by unbiased and wise Christians. What happened from early June was a series of excuses to delay an investigation and allowing Barry & Jennifer to share their testimony.

It was one of many communications between Barry & Jennifer Pendergast, Pastor Les Bon-Bernard, Pastor James Paton, Pastor Tim Beadle and Barry & Jennifer’s independent witness and advisor Pat Nixon. It followed instances where Barry & Jennifer were taken out of service in January 2015 based on unfounded suspicions, deliberately isolated from ministry activities during 2015/16 and eventually expelled from the Marriage Matters Ministry on May 26th 2016 without evidence being presented of any wrong doing. Although Pastor Bon-Bernard would later claim on 7 July 2016 he knew of no conflicts between the Pendergasts and Ron Buschman this is hard to believe that he was not consulted before such extreme action was taken knowing the physical, psychological and spiritual hurt and harm it would cause Barry & Jennifer within and outside the walls of FAC.

Barry & Jennifer continue to wait for a response that reflects their concerns are being heard and dealt with in an honest, transparent and timely manner with all bias removed. Despite promises made by Pastor Tim Beadle in early June 2016 Barry & Jennifer feel the grief they experienced has been unnecessarily prolonged by the lack of a well conceived approach for dealing with serious conflicts and abusive leadership in direct conflict with the stated core FAC leadership principles :

The foundation for effective ministry is given in I Peter 5:5-14. This text outlines four responsibilities
for ministry staff:
a. Ministry...Shepherd those under your care. Your relationship and commitment to people is your primary responsibility
b. Management...Serve as an overseer. Your strategy for leading in your key result areas should reflect you having the oversight and management of your ministry areas.
c. Modelling...Be an example to those under your care and your credibility. Model a commitment to the vision, values and mission of FAC. Support the church as a participating member.
d. Motive...Not greedy or from compulsion, eager to serve with the right attitudes and the right reasons.

See full job description
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/Family_Life_Pastor.pdf

In the recent emails exchanged Pastor Les Bon-Bernard suggested to Barry & Jennifer:

"My understanding is that your desire to have Pat Nixon involved in the process was to provide you with support and also to help ensure that an honest and transparent process takes place. This
you with support and also to help ensure that an honest and transparent process takes place. This was confirmed when we discussed Pat's role at our last meeting. With this in mind we do not feel it is necessary to involve a third party/mediator."

An immediate response from Pat Nixon noted *"I was asked by Barry and Jennifer to support them as they address the issues they have raised with you and Ron. Not a surprise to me as it is common for laypeople to feel intimidated by church leadership in the process of dealing with a serious conflict such as this .*
In your email you suggested it was my responsibility to ensure an honest and transparent process takes place. Surely the conflict resolution process at First Alliance must have that inherently built into every stage of the

methods used. Not everyone facing a conflict will have the opportunity for a witness to be present to assist them yet they should still be treated fairly and with respect in a fully transparent and Godly manner. "

See full exchange :
http://jspeer.com/barrypendergast/Pat_Nixon_Les_Bon-Bernard_emailsOct30.pdf

Why would an investigation of this seriousness be prolonged for more than six months unless the hope was it would eventually be forgotten or could be swept under the carpet? Why did the Pastor in charge, Pastor Bon-Bernard not take immediate action to fully investigate after the issues raised at the meeting held at the Area office July 7th? Clearly Barry & Jennifer shared how they had been traumatized by the experience yet Pastor Bon-Bernard was dismissive. Much later in November 2016 he would claim he had no access to the emails and notes because of confidentiality insisted by Barry & Jennifer - a completely unfounded claim.

How did this go so badly wrong when initially in November 2013 Barry & Jennifer Pendergast felt there was a huge opportunity to change the way FAC impacted families within and outside the walls in the community? To bring the love of Christ to all in a strong team environment. Be part of a disciple process in concert with other FAC ministries. Hold intergenerational events that would raise the profile of healthy families within and outside the church walls. Work cooperatively with all churches - act as a beacon of hope in very difficult economic times. Why would Barry & Jennifer be excluded from this ministry when they have shown a willing and cooperative spirit and capable skills in other parts of FAC and had over eighteen years in marital ministry experience?

BACKGROUND

For a number of years Barry & Jennifer Pendergast have been Calgary Regional Coaches with Relationship Central Canada, part of the world wide Alpha Ministry. They have demonstrated a deep passion for the ministry and worked cooperatively with many others over the 18 years. Running Marriage, Marriage Preparation, Parenting Courses, provided

training and facilitated FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication Study) inventories. Also have taken part in many Alberta & Canada wide initiatives and conferences on marriage & family matters.

In November 2013 through a contact with National Director of Relationship Central (Alpha Marriage & Family) Elaine Young, Barry& Jennifer Pendergast, as local Calgary coaches were asked to help in an emergency situation where the facilitator for a First Alliance Marriage Preparation Course had withdrawn at the last minute. Barry & Jennifer quickly and enthusiastically agreed to run the course and did three more in quick succession including one in their home. It was a wonderful experience working with Jamie Unruh the Marriage Ministry assistant and running additional FOCCUS inventories with most of the couples.

During this period the Barry & Jennifer started discussions with Ron Buschman, the newly appointed Team Leader for the FAC Marriage Matters Ministry and agreed to run a Marriage Course in the fall of 2014. During these early discussions Barry & Jennifer emphasized the need for building good communications, proper procedures/evaluations, ongoing training, reaching outside the walls and regular team building meetings. In any ministry these factors are critical but especially so in ministry involving marriage & family matters. Good communication is key! Barry & Jennifer also had a special concern for couples outside the church who had chosen to live together rather than choose marriage. They could never find any interest at FAC to take deliberate action to engage this large segment of the community who needs Christ's love to be shown in tangible and gracious ways.

However over the two and a half years Barry & Jennifer would find their passion for working in marriage and family matters seriously drained by the conditions experienced under Ron Buschman's leadership. It would lead them to have a total lack of trust in how leadership positions and the power they have could wield could be so be wrongly applied. So against the declared Christ like values of a servant leader approach declared in so many leadership appointment contracts in place at FAC

www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/Family_Life_Pastor.pdf

Barry & Jennifer could not see any evidence these principles of servant leadership were followed or monitored and regular feedback invited to ensure these critical values were being maintained.

It can be of little value to the Kingdom if a style of leadership is at cross purposes to these core values. For instance where leaders adopt an authoritative style of leadership that suppresses the natural talents. passions and gifts, suppresses critical and divergent thinking then there is a need to explore why this happening and implement corrective measures to restore faith.

When a team is set up it needs a clear vision that is continually monitored and could be likened to any form of successful teams - as in a successful sports team or an orchestra. Clear communication, using the individual's gifts , passions, and watching out for prideful leaders unwilling to share the ministry , and making unethical secretive decisions. A Christian leader must be able to answer, even invite tough questions and be accountable without displaying anger, counter attacking or blaming others when things go off cousre. Even more important in a Christian setting is the need for discipleship and evangelism to be a key component of all activities including marriage ministry.

Most will agree on the topic of sexual abuse and how to deal with it but spiritual abuse thats a whole bag of trouble best swept and well hidden under the carpet! Not unlike the intergenerational abuse that can happen in families if caring intervention is not available.

Plan To Protect, a national organization that works cooperatively with the Alliance Church nationally came out early this year with a webinar on the topic of Spiritual Abuse by church leaders. Not a happy topic for any Christian to accept that it occurs. They covered - How do you recognize it. How do you train up leaders to coach others to speak against this type of behaviour? Develop policies that establish parameters for what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Otherwise, leaders may continue to harass and discriminate others based on their own individual perspective.

Barry & Jennifer ask the Elder Board of First Alliance and representatives of the Alliance Area office to meet with them to start a discussion on this difficult topic after what they have been going through in trying to contribute to a ministry they have a demonstrated passion and gifting for.

For 2-1/2 years Barry & Jennifer were forced to participate in a team that has failed to meet the most basic requirements of the standard

First Alliance model with no apparent pastoral involvement or oversight.

Barry & Jennifer were never certain why this style of leadership was used. Was it due to lack familiarity with leading a team in a church environment, insecurity, uncomfortable with passionate team members, lack of monitoring or a lack of mentoring? Nevertheless Barry & Jennifer continue to be passionately intent in trying to bring about a God honouring process at FAC that will discontinue the spiritual abuse that has taken place in the past.

SPECIFIC CONCERNS:

1. In early 2015 Barry & Jennifer were taken out of leading a planned Marriage Course and another couple appointed less than 48 hours before the start without notice or discussion because the leader had unfounded, unsubstantiated and unstated suspicions about the deep concerns they had expressed about confidentiality issues concerning couples. Their desire was to take careful action to implement well understood policies on confidentiality. The leader's approach was deny their evidence and use the power of his position to force them into submission. It was a traumatic experience that would affect how they raised or did not raise issues of concern in the future. It caused a level of uncomfortable divisiveness between the Pendergasts and the other couple. Troubling emails that passed between Barry & Jennifer & Ron Buschman:
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/email_composite.pdf

How could this very aggressive and obstructive approach to problem solving be consistent with FAC values or with a marriage ministry.

Notes of the meeting where Ron Buschman aggressively confirmed his decision and ignored Barry & Jennifer's concerns of a lack of a policy on confidentiality. He also turned down their appeal.
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/January29_2015_mtg_Ron.pdf

Later in the year Barry & Jennifer experienced another case where confidential information was openly shared with them but they felt uncomfortable, even fearful to raise more concerns. Subsequently to the

Barry & Jennifer's knowledge there was no team discussion or a policy implemented and shared on confidentiality.

2. Ron Buschman failed to organize regular team meetings or arrange on-line discussion techniques with a result that communication was poor or non-existent. No agendas, no minutes taken or shared with members who could not attend. Use of on-line media was rarely used. Only one team meeting was held on the 19th January 2015 at which Ron & Teresa's vision was given. It was not shared before hand nor were comments invited. Not the best way to build a strong vision. At no time did the pastor involved attend a team meeting or team discussion that Barry & Jennifer attended . Ron & Teresa's vision evolved without any known team input:
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/Marriage_Matters_vision_Jan18.pdf

3. Team members were forced to accept decisions they were either uncomfortable with or had not undergone the safeguards of rigorous discussion needed with all team members. The kind of meal served at he Marriage & Marriage Preparation Courses is critical for its success. Ron Buschman claimed in an email on 15 December he was unable to get Harvest Ministries to supply suitable food and needed find alternatives. There is no evidence he investigated this thoroughly and would become angered when Barry insisted a proper menus be used. In any case financial and budget issues were never discussed. Surely fiscal issues should be part of a team's responsibility?
email : www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/harvest_ministry.pdf

4. An important decision to move the Pre-Married inventory process from FOCCUS to Prepare and Enrich was made without any discussion. A critical part of the inventory training process was omitted because of admitted difficulties between the Buschmans when thy had taken the inventory earlier. Only Ron Boschman would see all the team couples confidential details. There are continued concerns on how this documents are stored at FAC. When mentoring is finished all documentation should destroyed.

Although Barry & Jennifer had extensive experience with FOCCUS and took Prepare and Enrich training and are registered facilitators they were never involved in mentoring any couples at First Alliance
www.jspeer.com/barrypedner gast/Your_Prepare_Enrich_Relationship_Survey_Results.pdf

Equally Barry & Jennifer saw no evidence of ongoing training in any part of the Marriage Matters Ministry.

5. The leader seemed set on doing everything possible to sabotage the ongoing value of a Alpha Marriage Course even though the first 2 sessions were well received and had huge opportunity to be used as evangelism tool beyond the church walls. A number of times the leader went behind the Barry & Jennifer's backs. In one instance he held discussions and organized a Marriage & Marriage Preparation Course training event in cooperation with Foothills Alliance but failed to inform the team members for input or support. Barry & Jennifer would only hear well after because of their long relationship with Brad & Elise Boshman at Foothills Alliance, fellow Relationship Central coaches. Making decisions without full communication was confusing and unfortunately typical.
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/Brad_MC_Training.pdf.

Certainly the event was of little benefit to FAC and no couples attended from there and thus the pool of capable facilitators was not increased.

A further marriage Course was planned for the Spring of 2015 and Barry & Jennifer offered to help but heard no more.
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/ron_new_leaders_23feb.pdf

6. Similarly other events and decisions would happen without team knowledge. A series of Marriage Matters bible studies were held but ministry questions were discouraged. At one the question of a regular newsletter was discussed but implementation was refused because of a lack of resources even though team members offered to help. It puzzled Barry & Jennifer because the Marriage Matters assistant Anne Freeman produces an excellent news letter for the Seniors Ministry.

Ron Buschman would have individual discussions with members of the team, arrange events but the results were never shared with the rest of the team causing communication confusion.

A further Marriage Course was apparently planned for the Fall of 2015 but Barry & Jennifer heard nothing.
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/marriage_course_fall15.pdf

7. During the period from November 2013 and November 2015 Barry & Jennifer would have no communication with the Pastor in charge - Pastor Bon-Bernard. Never a "how are things going"? Never a query why a third Marriage Course was not going ahead. Barry & Jennifer did make a request to meet him in October 2015 and waited almost 6 weeks to discuss an issue with him and Ron Buschman. The meeting lasted less than 9 minutes because Pastor Bon_Bernard had another meeting to rush to. Barry & Jennifer felt the behaviour of Pastor Bon-Benard and Ron Buschman was very dismissive. At a meeting on 30 August 2016 Pastor Bon-Bernard would claim Ron Bushman was the Pastor in charge of the Marriage Matters Ministry when asked what was the basis of the appointment? Was the job description as previous posted?
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/Family_Life_Pastor.pdf

At the same meeting Pastor Bon-Bernard dismissed the Spiritual Abuse policy document by Plan to Protect since FAC no longer use their abuse protection system. Basically FAC now had little in the way of abuse protection except for sexual abuse of children. There simply is no process. Barry & Jennifer do have thoughts about how to solve this.

8. Sometime during 2015 Barry & Jennifer believe Ron Buschman took steps without full team discussion to organize a core group within the team with whom he would make all future decisions. No news or information was subsequently received by Barry & Jennifer. It would lead to broken relationships and divisiveness

9. On the 29 January 2016 Barry & Jennifer met with Pastor James Paton and laid out their difficulties and asked for help to get them back involved in the Marriage Matters Ministry. A key point of this was how to build a team with strong foundations to allow it to grow in the future to serve both the church and outside in the community for those with or without faith. Barry &

Jennifer found Pastor Paton sympathetic and compassionate and he promised to follow through but health problems likely delayed this. However it is assumed he shared the key points of the Barry & Jennifer's concerns with Pastor Les Bon-Bernard. Pastor Paton did note that Ron Buschman was very busy with his work duties which might account for the difficulties they had encountered.

Subsequently all Barry & Jennifer had was a request from Pastor Les Bon-Bernard to contact Ron Bushman. Vacations on both sides delayed this and frankly Barry & Jennifer felt the meeting with Pastor Paton had been a waste of time.

10. On 24 May 2016 Barry & Jennifer received an urgent request from Ron Buschman:

" Hello Barry & Jennifer,
Would there be a time during the next 5 days when we could meet?
At that time, I would welcome the opportunity to address concerns you may have with me personally, and possibly the marriage ministry at FAC.

Blessings,
Ron Buschman *"*

Quite why the 5 day urgency is unknown however they felt the invitation was deceptive in that its purpose on 27 May was to expel Barry & Jennifer from the Marriage Matters Team based on a misuse of scripture and no evidence or witnesses to support the wrongdoing claimed. Barry & Jennifer's notes on that meeting:
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/Ron&Teresa_27May16.pdf

How Pastor Bon-Bernard and the other Marriage Matters team members were informed or participated in the decision is unknown.

11. A last and bewildering email was received from Ron Buschman on 1 June 2016. Seemed having everything under his 'control' was critical to his

role as leader. Seemed to Barry & Jennifer totally at odds with what a servant leader centred on Christ should be.
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/ron_control_june1_2016.pdf

12. What would add to the Pendergast sense of grief pain and shock was they would discover Ron Buschman some weeks earlier had called Elaine Young, the Canadian Director for Alpha's Relationship Central and informed her that they had been removed from the FAC Marriage Matters Ministry because of conflict with him and the team. A deliberate act to hurt and harm their reputation with the International Ministry Barry & Jennifer had joyfully to served for more than 18 years.
Notes from phone conversation:
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/elaine_young_call.pdf

13. Soon after Ron Buschman gave a video lesson on forgiveness & love. It seemed totally at odds with Barry & Jennifer's experience with him. Only weeks before he had betrayed them to Elaine Young & harmed their reputation about three weeks before the meeting on 27 May. Why? What on earth were the motives?

From Luke 7 *"To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person.*

Ron's Video lesson: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLFZVUMHzXE

Subsequent to the expelling Barry & Jennifer were left in deep shock and looked to mature Christian friends for prayer, help and advice. One led the them to ask Plan to Protect for advice. At their request details of their experiences were shared:
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/An_Urgent_Plea_For_Help.pdf

Plan to Protect quickly enrolled Barry & Jennifer in a webinar on Spiritual Abuse and advised them to seek a wise independent Christian advisor and witness to any future meetings. Pat Nixon kindly agreed to be their spiritual advisor and witness at any or all meetings and to vet all correspondence.

Plan to Protect put Barry & Jennifer in contact with Pastor Tim Beadle at the Area Alliance office in Calgary and they met shortly afterwards. They found Pastor Beadle compassionate and seemed to quickly grasp the key issues and concerns . He suggested he would like to arrange a meeting with a representative from First Allliance. Barry & Jennifer said their preference was with Pastor Ray Matheson because they felt a great deal of trust with him.

This was turned down and after some exchange of emails Tim Beadle assured Barry & Jennifer Pastor Bon-Bernard would like to meet and assured us his heart was to find a good outcome and had a system for dealing with issues of this kind. Barry & Jennifer would see no evidence of this in the coming months. Just heartless delays.
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/Coach_Connection1.pdf

A first meeting was held at the area CMA office on 7 July 2016 Pastor Bon- Bernard claimed he knew of no conflict between the Marriage Matters Team Leader and the Pendergasts. That he did not believe there was any spiritual or other abuse involved. That left Barry & Jennifer uncomfortable on the issue of trust. How could they have been expelled without discussions between Pastor Bon-Bernard and Ron Buschman? Also the discussions between Pastor Paton and Barry & Jennifer should have raised a red flag.

A later meeting left both Barry & Jennifer and their advisor uncomfortable with the direction Pastor Bon-Benard was leading the process and subsequently sent an email requesting for an independent arbitration.
www.jspeer.com/barrypendergast/Pat_Nixon_response_Les_Oct30.pdf

This was an approach supported by Plan to Protect, Pat Nixon and independent councillors.

Barry& Jennifer together with Pat Nixon pray this time of challenge will not go wasted. As in all things God only has the best intentions for us all.

Advice was sought from the Chairman of the elders in early December 2016 and Pastor Bon_Bernard relinquished ‘control’ of the file to Elder

Brent Kinnie. At a meeting held 12 December with Brent, Pat and Les Barry & Jennifer felt their perception of past issues & meetings was being unfairly challenged and subsequently emailed Brent to raise their concerns: that had arisen www.jspeer.com/barrypednergast/Brent_Kinnie_13Decmber16.pdf
Brent promised that he would try to have these matters resolved by the end of January 2017.