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To Whom It May Concern:

In May of 2016, I received a phone call from Barry Pendergast. Barry had been referred to Plan to Protect® as he understood I worked to prevent abuse among the vulnerable sector and that many of our clients were churches.

After a short phone conversation with Barry, I agreed to meet him while I was in Calgary at Assembly. At the time, I did not know what church Barry attended or the specifics of their experience. Barry wanted to tell his story. He willingly met me at First Alliance as he was serving at Assembly.

I spent only a few minutes with Barry at Assembly where he shared his story. He also shared with me the experiences he has had trying to report this and the trauma he and his wife have experienced as a result. Jennifer was not comfortable coming to First Alliance at the time to talk to me in person, as she felt it would be too difficult to come into the building.

At the time, I explained to Barry that yes indeed we (Plan to Protect®) work to raise awareness of abuse, train volunteers, and staff how to recognize the signs and indicators. I also explained to Barry that we did not only deal with child abuse but had recently expanded to vulnerable adult abuse at the request of our clients. I told him that our clients were the churches and that we do not include in our services intervention or mediation once abuse has occurred or allegations of abuse have been voiced. I asked Barry if he had communicated his concerns to the Sr. Pastor, and encouraged him if he did not feel that the issue was resolved at that level to meet with Tim Beadle. I helped schedule that meeting for Friday, June 3rd and handed it over to Tim at the time. I communicated this with Barry in writing and over the phone that my concern was for their well-being and that I would pray on their behalf.

With that said, over the course of the next eleven months Barry has continued to reach out to me. He has encouraged me to continue to call for increased awareness of spiritual and vulnerable adult abuse. His desire is that others not experience the same thing they have. I continue to pray for him and Jennifer as he would update me on the progress and upcoming meetings he had scheduled.

I understand the church leadership has recently determined that from your perspective no wrongdoing, emotional or spiritual abuse has occurred.

According to Plan to Protect® we have defined these forms of abuse as:

Emotional Abuse:
Emotional abuse is a pattern of behaviour that attacks an individual's emotional development and sense of self-worth. It includes excessive, aggressive or unreasonable demands that place expectations on an individual beyond his or her capacity. Emotional abuse includes criticizing, teasing, belittling, insulting, rejecting, ignoring, or isolating a person.

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Spiritual Abuse:
We believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ and affirm the importance of Christian evangelism. However, we do not believe that this justifies any means to fulfill that end. Hence, we disavow the use of any coercive techniques or manipulative appeals that bypass a person's critical faculties, play on psychological weaknesses, undermine the relationship with family or religious institutions, or mask the true nature of Christian conversion. While respecting the individual integrity, intellectual honesty and academic freedom of other believers and skeptics, we seek to proclaim Christ openly. We reveal our own identity and purpose, our theological positions and sources of information, and we will not be intentionally misleading. Respect for human integrity means no false advertising, no personal aggrandizement from successfully persuading others to follow Jesus, and no overly emotional appeals which minimize reason and evidence.

The risk of abuse occurs whenever there is an imbalance of power, authority, influence and control.

Barry and Jennifer have asked me to put in writing my observations from our interactions directly with them.

I can only share from my interactions with them that the Pendergasts loved the family/marriage ministry they were involved in and had been involved in for many years. They speak to being removed from that ministry and not invited back. They share that they never received volunteer reviews or feedback on their ministry. They voice that they were heartbroken and felt they were made redundant. They also speak to the fact that they felt they didn't have a voice or opportunity to disagree with the decision. They did not feel or do they feel shepherded or pastored, listened to by church leadership, valued in the process.

I can attest that during this time I have witnessed and observed many indicators of trauma including fear, pain, and stress.

I cannot say emphatically that this precious couple has been abused. However, I do believe that if both parties cannot come to an agreement, the determination would only be able to be made by an impartial mediator or by the courts. I don't believe this has yet happened. I encourage you to seek out an impartial mediator who specializes in this. I also encourage all parties to seek to love each other deeply and spur each other on spiritually. From my experience, research and studies, if abuse and/or wrongdoing has occurred, (which, there are many indicators to believe it may have), the journey to healing will not be quick, the memories of abuse may be triggered, there will be a need to grieve and lament over the experience (to be truly heard), and to advocate for change. It is not something that can easily be forgotten or got over.

I continue to pray for all parties involved that God would be glorified that our churches would be safe!

Sincerely,

Melodie Bissell

Melodie Bissell, D.Min. Candidate
President and CEO