

## A HUGE ROLE FOR ADULTS SAVING KIDS

What is the hidden but major problem for kids today? The predators seeking to entrap them have multiplied many times over. Kids are fair game, but few are noticing. The shallow, safe part of the stream has moved much closer to the strong current that will sweep them over the waterfalls.

Even home is no longer safe. In the past many parents have sought to keep their children around home as a safe haven. With computers, video games, TV, music, and telephone, those who seek to take advantage have a straight conduit right into the eyes and ears, minds and hearts of our young people.

Do you believe that 300,000 Internet pornographers are going to leave your child and your family alone? Not if they can help it.

If you went with us to our trainings and met the people we meet, you would find people talking about young people they know who have been severely harmed or entrapped. Yes, sometimes into child molestation, rape, sex parties, drugs, alcohol, gangs, prostitution, stripping, using pornography, running off with someone through chat rooms. Kids are vulnerable, and clever schemers are getting at them in loveless and sophisticated ways.

What can be done? Most people have little idea what they can do. We at ADULTS SAVING KIDS have learned of much that can be done. But first people must get involved. We must up the ante. We must wake up. This is not

a task for a few, like a football game where 100,000 people watch 22 players. Everyone must get on the field. That is the way we at ADULTS SAVING KIDS are now working.

If we begin working with a new synod, we are expecting **every one** of the women to be in the game. Each person can pray. Each person can help make sure their church uses the *Wise as Serpents* course and that their church is praying for its youth.

Parents can really be there for their children, and others can encourage and support parents. Each person can make sure his or her pastor has faced reality and is addressing these issues in the classroom and in the pulpit.

We are starting to measure just how many kids have been positively impacted by our material and our prayer projects. We seek to have those numbers vividly displayed so people can see the progress they are making. We must model concrete steps, actually safeguarding kids, not just verbalizing good intentions.

Help us now "build the wall of safety" upon the 13-year old foundation that we have laid. One of our volunteers thanked us for doing the foundational work that makes what is happening now so imminently possible.

We find ourselves in the right place at the right time to make a difference. Pray our mission and ministry will move forward by the grace and power of God in Christ.

By Rev. Al Erickson

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### The mission of ADULTS SAVING KIDS:

To prevent commercial sexual exploitation, bringing honor and accountability to all relationships.

## ADVENTURES

### AL ERICKSON AND HEIDI FEATURED IN *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*

The November 2003 issue of *Christianity Today* contains an article “The Hidden Slavery,” highlighting the sexual trafficking of women and children around the world. The writer, Wendy Murray Zoba, interviewed Al Erickson and Heidi to get a perspective on what is going on in the United States. Zoba writes:

“Erickson is troubled by the reticence he senses among Christians to face this issue honestly and boldly. It is due in large part to the lack of knowledge about how sexual exploitation works and what is at stake. Heidi, who knows Erickson and his work, concurs: ‘In every church there are husbands addicted to pornography, a child who may be being seduced, or a woman who was once trapped in prostitution. But they can’t talk about it in church. So they keep it inside as a dark secret.’” Read the entire article at [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com).

### AL ERICKSON BACK IN MINNESOTA

Al Erickson has been in California for the past two months, undergoing proton therapy for prostate cancer. He is back at home and doing well, grateful for the many prayers he received and the opportunity to receive this new therapy.

### TRYING SOMETHING NEW...

We are trying something new with this issue of the *ADULTS SAVING KIDS Adventures*. We felt it was time to combine the *Adventures* with the *Stoptlight*, so we are trying to give you the best of each: the latest on what is happening with the organization and “meaty” stories that shed light on commercial sexual exploitation.

### CONNECTING WITH OPRAH

On September 25, 2003 the Oprah Winfrey Show focused on juvenile prostitution. Al Erickson worked with one of the staff people involved in creating that show. Her response when she saw the *Wise as Serpents* video was, “Every home in America should have this video.”

### SEXUAL TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS: THE MINNESOTA EXPERIENCE

Over 250 people gathered at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul on October 22 for the first-ever conference in Minnesota focused on sexual trafficking. The Center for Women, Economic Justice, and Public Policy at the College of St. Catherine and the Center for Women Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. teamed up to organize this conference.

An impressive panel of experts from Minnesota shared their insights:

“Every prostituted woman is trafficked. They are trafficked from rural areas to the metro area; from Minnesota to other states.”

*Anne Taylor, Hennepin County Attorney’s Office*

“Kids come out of dysfunctional families and meet up with pimps at the bus terminal or malls. 1000-3000 kids in Minnesota need shelter on any given night. We need to catch kids before the pimps do.”

*Attorney General Mike Hatch*

“We need to look beyond putting people in prison. We need to respect women. We need to look at all kids as our own.”

*Ruben Rosario, St. Paul Pioneer Press reporter*

“Minnesota is a source state for juveniles in prostitution who are sent throughout the country. Pimps like blonde and naïve girls because they bring in more money. Girls from small towns and suburbs are getting recruited. There is an increase in recruitment on Native American reservations. Pimps like to go wherever kids hang out.”

*Andrew Schmidt, Minneapolis Police Department*

Stuart Goldberg and Amy Hartman from ADULTS SAVING KIDS led a workshop on prevention.

People who attended the conference are continuing to come together for further networking, planning, and action in four areas: Affecting Legislation, Improving Services, Educating Others, and Building a Minnesota Network.

## ADULTS SAVING KIDS A PART OF LUTHER SEMINARY PASTORAL CARE CLASS

*On November 11, Amy Hartman and Mary Molstad (Speaker Coordinator from the LaCrosse Area Synod), gave a presentation at Luther Seminary on the topic of sexual exploitation. They were joined by Bob Dykstra, who spoke about sexual addiction. What follows are comments from the professor of this class.*

This has been the fifth time that I have taught the course on Domestic and Sexual Abuse, and this time it was greatly enhanced by the presentation provided by ADULT SAVING KIDS. Without the passion of others for their particular work, I would not have been able to teach this course.

My intent for asking ADULTS SAVING KIDS to make a presentation was twofold. First, it was to satisfy course objectives – Towards building and participating in an extensive community network that attends to prevention, security, treatment, and pastoral care. One of my unstated goals in this respect, is to model for students how one works collaboratively across a broad spectrum with others who are committed to similar goals.

Secondly, my intent was to introduce the students to the work of ADULTS SAVING KIDS. I could tell by the questions and their level of engagement with the presenters that they were intellectually provoked and stimulated. After having time to process the experience with the students, it is clear that the presentation made some profound impressions upon them. I observed that hearts were touched.

The materials that the students received will be resource materials in the future congregations, agencies, organizations, and communities these students will be serving. I look forward to inviting ADULTS SAVING KIDS to present to this class when I teach it again.

*Dr. Richard M. Wallace, Th.D.  
Associate Professor, Pastoral Care  
Luther Seminary  
ADULTS SAVING KIDS Board Member*

## BISHOP'S TASK FORCE ON COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION BEING FORMED

Kari Christianson, ADULTS SAVING KIDS board member and vice-president of the Minneapolis Area Synod, is working with Bishop Craig Johnson to form a task force focused on implementing the *ELCA Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation*. Task force members have met once, and Kari is currently seeking members from the St. Paul Area Synod as well.

## LIKELY PARTNERS: JUST LOOK AROUND

One day a brochure showed up in our office. It is a simple brochure that encourages people to:

**Let kids grow up in their own time.**

**Let kids be kids.**

**Stop the sexual use of children in advertising.**

The brochure was developed by the North Carolina Pediatric Society. It identifies seven elements of advertising which make for sexual exploitation:

1. Using preadolescent girls made up to mimic adults in sexualized poses.
2. Invoking adult sexual themes by dressing or making up a child.
3. Unduly emphasizing the clothed or unclothed genitals and buttocks of children or adults made to look like children.
4. Confusing the true age of a child-like model in a sexualized post or situation.
5. Sexualizing the nudity of a child or child-like model, whether the nudity is real or implied.
6. Equipping adult models with childhood props and facial expressions that create a sense of helplessness or vulnerability in a sexual context.
7. Sexualizing a child by association with an adult who is nude or sexualized.

In addition to the brochure, you can order a video which demonstrates various forms of print advertising media that portray children as sexualized objects. We have all been desensitized, and this material will help raise your – and others' – awareness.

# ADVENTURES

## WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?????

*Lately there has been a lot of media attention directed toward the issue of commercial sexual exploitation. Fictional stories, some teased from “headlines,” fill the evening dramas, and life stories are highlighted on popular day-time television talk shows. They are stories of the murder, mayhem and family disruption brought about this predatory industry.*

*ADULTS SAVING KIDS has been speaking about prevention and encouraging all of you to bring the Prayer Project Lifesaver ministry and the Wise as Serpents curriculum into your churches and schools – any place where youth can be reached and educated. Bringing these ministries to your congregation can transform your community. Here are a few of the stories from congregations that have done so.*

### **Prayer Project Lifesaver**

#### **St. James Lutheran Church in Concord, NC North Carolina Synod – ELCA**

This large congregation north of Charlotte has been praying for **all** of their children for the past two years using *Prayer Project Lifesaver*.

This summer twenty of their young people traveled to Valley, Alabama on a mission project. It was not the first time they have done this mission trip, but it was dramatically the most fulfilling trip. Both the young people and their chaperones spoke about having the strength and the energy to have a good experience – the best they ever had.

I asked the North Carolina Synodical Women’s Organization prayer ministry coordinator for Adults Saving Kids, Cathy Sell, what made it such an exceptional experience. She said, “They (the kids) talked every night that people back home were praying for them. The chaperones related that there had been no acting out, no pushing the envelope. It was mellow!” The people who are praying for these youth experienced the treasure of bringing the children before God. What greater gift can we give them!

### **Prayer Project Lifesaver**

#### **Good Shepherd Lutheran in Viroqua, WI LaCrosse Area Synod - ELCA**

This congregation had adults praying for 242 children – from Baptism through age 22. Karen Birkedal, Prayer Project Lifesaver coordinator for ADULTS SAVING KIDS in the LaCrosse Area Synod, shares this story of building bridges.

A young child received a hand-knitted sweater from a homebound woman praying for her. While the child enjoyed having the sweater, the sweater was more pointedly a reminder to the child that she was prayed for *every day*. This 3<sup>rd</sup> grader was so overwhelmed that she decided she wanted to visit her ‘pray-er’ and bring some homemade bread and jelly. The mother was very moved by her child’s wish to say “Thank you.” At the visit, the child asked if there was anything she could do, and this woman, who is loving this child through prayer, said, “You can pray for me.” And so she is.

Karen says “It goes back and forth. You can see how God’s spirit will work once we lift up another person. It’s an amazing adventure. The churches that are doing this are asking ‘What do we do next?’ One congregation new to Prayer Project Lifesaver wants to spread it to four other churches before they have even started it themselves.”

### **Wise as Serpents**

#### **Westby-Coon Prairie Lutheran in Westby, WI LaCrosse Area Synod - ELCA**

Pastor Steve Meyer has taught *Wise as Serpents* to 50 confirmation-age youth. The kids say they like that they are learning from “real people” who show them that this is not a glamorous life, and that it’s easy for anyone to get lured in. After completing the curriculum, one child commented on the “glamorous” life of a woman in prostitution as portrayed in a TV drama, but now knows that’s not the way it really is.

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I asked Steve how parents have reacted. One mother had resisted showing the video to the kids. After she assisted with the program, however, she said, "I can't believe we ever questioned whether it should have been shown!"

One of the discussions hinges on the definition of "Prostitution is sex for 'something' – just fill in the blank." Without prompting, one 12-year-old girl said, "You mean like 'sex for cigarettes'?" This girl has some insight into what's going on with young people around her.

I asked Pastor Steve "What difference does teaching *Wise as Serpents* make for you?" His response touched me to the core: "When I'm teaching I am often struck by an individual child's vulnerability, and I want to be sure I connect the material with that individual kid.

If it were not for this material, I don't know how I would otherwise talk about this subject. It has opened my eyes to the depth of the problem – right here in Westby – population 2,006."

#### *Wise as Serpents*

#### **St. James Lutheran Church in Columbus, MT Montana Synod - ELCA**

Pastor Michael O'Hearn has been teaching *Wise as Serpents* in his congregation for the past 3 years. He has reached 25 kids and 10-15 adults, a small but crucial sampling in this town of 1,800.

Says Pastor Michael, "I keep teaching this even though the kids and the adults continue to say it doesn't happen here, that they would not be tricked into this industry, or get on porn sites."

Yet his youthful congregants share with him what they experience in high school related to drugs and alcohol, with what seems to be very little intervention. "People may not be willing to face the danger. People can pretend it doesn't exist. People can be uncomfortable, and resist talking about the dangers, but I am certain they exist."

So why would Pastor Michael not just give up and say "What good does it do?" "Well," he says,

"I am called to this. *Wise as Serpents* is a daily reminder, a motivator, to keep the message going. I assume that, sooner or later, someone will take the information we give them and make a wise decision in the face of a dangerous and manipulative situation."

*These ministries in your congregations will prevent your children and their families from being manipulated into danger and sorrow. We are here to get you started. For more information, please contact our office.*

*by Phyllis Beatty*

#### **TRAINING NEWS: THINGS ARE HAPPENING**

**Southwestern Minnesota:** On November 13, team members Ilene Penk, Janice Franck, Kristina Braaten-Lee, and Carol Etter sponsored a half-day training in the use of *Wise as Serpents*. Six new women, representing three congregations, are now bringing back to their church communities the opportunity to prevent their children from being exploited. Praise God for the boldness of these women.

**North Carolina:** Core team members Sharon Johnson, Cathy Sells, and Carrie Graves hosted and led a weekend training in October. Praise God for their commitment and for the good work in bringing new people onto the team. In addition the North Carolina team is deepening their relationships with partner organizations and churches within their synod.

**Western North Dakota:** At a weekend training in August, core team members Barb Gullickson and Leone Bolinske trained an additional eight people, including the new Prayer Project Lifesaver Coordinator Maybelle Oplund and Kris Brugamy, President of the Western North Dakota Synodical Women's Organization.

Pastor Shirley Teske of First Lutheran in Fessenden hosted a training for congregations to implement *Wise as Serpents* and Prayer Project Lifesaver. Praise God for the leadership team and their extraordinary commitment to the kids and the congregations in their synod.

# ADVENTURES

## **PORNOGRAPHY: A FATHER'S VIEW**

I would like to share with you my experience in dealing with my 14-year old son who was viewing internet pornography.

My wife and I thought our computer was safe for him to be using because we had placed parental controls on it through our internet provider. My wife was the first person to discover that he had been viewing these sites. First she found a printed photograph on the floor by the computer printer. Then she looked at the temporary internet browser log and could tell by the many "cookies" that he had been going to many different sites.

She confronted our son with the picture, and he said he got it from someone on the bus. She told him she could tell he had been to many pornographic sites by the trail he left. She did not shame him about what he had done, but explained to him the degrading nature of what he was watching. She told him these sites did not depict the true nature of a real, intimate, caring sexual relationship within a marriage. She also explained that this was degrading to the people he was viewing and to himself.

We reduced the amount of time our son could be on the computer to one hour a day and only when one of us was present. Our son was relieved to have been caught and was contrite, but begged his mother not to tell me, his dad.

After a period of months my wife told what had occurred, but asked me not to say anything to our son yet. I reviewed the internet browser log and found what looked like a trail of pornographic sites again. I became quite concerned, especially because my wife already had a discussion with him about this issue.

One day when he came home from school, I told him we needed to talk about what he was doing when he was spending time on the computer. He immediately became uncomfortable and then tearful, saying "Dad, I feel so bad, but whenever I get on the computer, this stuff just keeps popping up and coming on. It just seems to suck me in."

At this point I shared with him that I knew how those sites were so seductive in pulling you in and how addictive they could be. I told him that I had struggled with this very same issue in the past and that probably most men did.

I told him that the fact that he felt so ashamed and dirty after viewing these materials was a sure indication of how destructive and demeaning this whole business was. He asked me to forgive him, and I told him that I certainly did. I told him that he was not a bad person for getting caught up in what he had been viewing. I told him that we would protect him from these sites and take away his internet privileges completely until we figured out a way to keep these sites from popping up without warning. I hugged him and assured him that we would work this out together - that he would not have to figure this out alone.

It is my belief that we as adults, particularly men, need to acknowledge our own weaknesses and vulnerabilities in this area. If we shame our sons and tell them what demented persons they are for having fallen into this type of behavior, this only serves to further damage their self esteem and to perpetuate more of this type of behavior. We need to hold ourselves accountable if we want to help our children deal with this demoralizing and negative behavior.

We live in a society in which we are constantly bombarded with all kinds of sexual images and messages touting free sexual expression. At the same time, our society becomes very harsh, punitive, and critical of those that fall into the seductive trap of pornography. It is essential for us to discuss with our children the negative and abusive ramifications of the destructive nature of deviant media influences. We are all susceptible to this type of sin and we all must flee its presence whenever we can.

In short, accountability and support for each other in dealing with these destructive influences in our society is of the utmost importance in our day.

*by an Intern Pastor*

## HEARTLAND GIRLS' RANCH: NEW PROGRAM FOR GIRLS

Heartland Girls' Ranch in Benson, MN has been asked to begin a program for juvenile girls exiting prostitution. Al Erickson worked with Catie Lee and Cynthia Teroouw to arrange a trip to Los Angeles to be trained by Dr. Lois Lee at Children of the Night. He also went with them to several other programs in the Los Angeles area. It is important that all of us in Minnesota, North Dakota, and surrounding states do all we can to make this program a success as it will be only the third one of its kind operating in the United States.

## ADULTS SAVING "KOINS FOR KIDS"

You are invited to join others in saving your coins for the benefit of saving the lives of kids. How? Simply request a "Koins for Kids" label and slotted plastic lid, which are designed to fit a Campbell's Soup can. Assemble your special can and drop your spare change into it. Once the can is full, send a check for that amount to ADULTS SAVING KIDS. (No coins please!) When we all get involved, we CAN save kids!

**START PRAYING  
FOR OUR KIDS.  
STOP THE PREYING  
ON OUR KIDS.**

## CURA RESEARCH ASSISTANT WORKING ON A MINNESOTA DIRECTORY

Rebecca Nash, a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, is working with ADULTS SAVING KIDS for the fall semester of 2003 to create a directory of organizations that work on the issue of commercial sexual exploitation. She has been involved with the conference at St. Catherine's as well. Her work is made possible by a grant from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. If you know of any organizations that should be included in this directory, please contact our office.

## THANK YOU TO THRIVENT FINANCIAL FOR LUTHERANS

In the fall of 2001, ADULTS SAVING KIDS received a grant from Thrivent (then Aid Association for Lutherans) to fund a speaker training project. Since that time, we have accomplished the following:

**Held 11 trainings.**

**Trained 67 people**, with some attending two or more trainings.

**Speakers have given over 200 presentations**, often with more than one speaker present.

**Speakers have reached over 7100 people.**

**Good work everyone!**

## ADULTS SAVING KIDS CONGREGATIONS TRAINING IN JANUARY 2004

On January 17, 2004 we will have our first training for teams from ADULTS SAVING KIDS Congregations. These teams will learn how to lead *Wise as Serpents*, start Prayer Project Lifesaver, and encourage further action within and beyond their congregation to prevent the exploitation of young people. If your congregation would like to learn more about being an ADULTS SAVING KIDS Congregation, please call our office.

## THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS...

- Susan Krause for her graphic design work on the Koins for Kids labels and her editing of the Prayer Project Lifesaver manual.
- Ken Beenken for his bookkeeping assistance.
- John Watne for his website design.
- Robert Burich for his computer assistance.
- Ruth Englestad for her work in the office.

## ADVENTURES

### ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE BLESSED

We truly believe those who stand with children by giving to ADULTS SAVING KIDS will be superbly blessed. We believe several thousand dollars given to ADULTS SAVING KIDS will save several children from being exploited or sexually addicted. Our efforts are remarkably cost efficient when compared with the cost of \$75,000 to get one girl off the streets. While it does take money to do the work of prevention, this is not really about money. It is about reaching our kids, and that is the only thing that matters.

One family has given us \$6,000 this year. Imagine their satisfaction in knowing that many families will be saved from the horror of what could have happened. Put yourself in the stream of being blessed by our God who promises, “Your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday” (Isaiah 58: 10).

This is about blessing our children, and being blessed by them in turn: blessed by their love, gifts and talents. Compare this to the loss of those gifts, and the pain of children and their families lost to exploitation. How many kids can we reach? How quickly? The matter is urgent, and it is time we rise to the occasion.

We cannot out-give God. You and I will be near God’s heart as we step on the field on behalf of our young people. Life passes us by quickly. Recovering from cancer, I am back, blessed by many prayers and experiencing good health. Let us each notice how we have been blessed and decide how we can bless others through ADULTS SAVING KIDS. Let us play big, and give big while we can. That is what I plan to do by God’s grace. Please join me that God may be honored and our precious kids may be secure in our love, our respect and our efforts on their behalf.

*by Rev. Al Erickson*