

The STOP Light

Volume 8, Number 2

December 1997

© Copyright 2002, ADULTS SAVING KIDS

In 2002 our organization changed its name to ADULTS SAVING KIDS. Prior to that we were called A-STOP (Alliance for Speaking Truths On Prostitution), STOP (Speaking Truths on Prostitution), or Grassroots Ministry Alliance.

ADULTS SAVING KIDS
1901 Portland Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55404
612/872-0684
www.adultsavingskids.org

Prevention curriculum developed

Editor's note: This issue of The STOP Light highlights a confirmation curriculum called Wise as Serpents being developed by A-STOP and Grassroots Ministry Alliance. A challenge grant of \$50,000 has been offered by Aid Association for Lutherans to write, test, and publish this curriculum to prevent youth from being exploited by the sex industry. On page 8, Al Erickson, founder and director of A-STOP and Grassroots Ministry Alliance, writes about how young men can get deceived by the sex industry. Several advisory board members and the writer of the curriculum have been interviewed. This lead article introduces Wise as Serpents.

- A young woman chooses not to work at a strip club, even though her boyfriend says she could make a lot of money.
- A 14-year-old boy decides not to watch porn movies because he wants to have respect for the bodies that God created.
- A teenage girl doesn't trust the guy she's talking to because what he's offering sounds too good to be true.
- A young man learns how people are hurt by prostitution and vows he will never be a customer.

What do all these young people have in common? They are "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." (Matthew 10:16) They are wise to the treachery and recruitment of commercial sexual exploitation. They make choices out of knowledge rather than ignorance. They realize how their actions can hurt others and themselves, and they choose to be harmless as doves.

Having young people live their lives in this way is a vision of A-STOP. *Wise as Serpents* is a tool that will help us achieve that vision. The confirmation curriculum will be used with junior high youth who are at an age in which they are very vulnerable to peer pressure or to being recruited and exploited by the sex industry.

The curriculum has six sessions, each with a Bible passage, group and individual activities, discussion outlines, and stories about boys and girls who are faced with the realities of commercial sexual exploitation. There is also a one hour video with 10-minute segments

showing a survivor of prostitution talking about her life and what young people need to know so they don't get deceived by the sex industry.

Wise as Serpents covers the following topics: being created in God's image; God is present in the midst of pain; having personal boundaries; who can and cannot be trusted; the effects of a desire for money; who is hurt by sexual exploitation, and what can be done to end exploitation.

Since receiving notice of the AAL challenge grant, we have been working diligently to raise the matching money. (See insert for the update on this fundraising effort.) We heartily thank AAL and all our donors for their encouraging support of this project both spiritual and financial.

As you read more about *Wise as Serpents* in this issue, please consider helping us by:

- making a financial contribution to this effort
- discussing the curriculum with youth workers at your church
- praying for the Lord's guidance for this project

Thank you for your continued encouragement and support.

Amy Hartman, Wise as Serpents project manager

Curriculum advisor becomes learner again

Audrey Duensing, director of Christian education at Cross View Lutheran Church, Edina, Minnesota

While working at a church in Michigan, three girls from the congregation got into prostitution. I didn't know much about prostitution at the time; didn't have any kind of support system for dealing with what was going on in their lives. I was never sure whether or not I dealt with the situations well. I struggled with how to get them out and how to prevent this from happening to others. I learned that getting into prostitution can happen very fast to anybody.

I became a *Wise as Serpents* Advisory Board member because I was intrigued by the topic. At the time I was trying to help these girls, I didn't know much about how kids get involved in prostitution. This is an opportunity for me to learn about the issue and how to prevent young people from getting involved.

For the first time in a long time, I am not a leader but a learner. I used to think that Jesus was the end-all and cure-all for the pain in a person's life. From conversations with a survivor of prostitution, I learned that some people never feel completely cleansed from their past. They will deal with their pain every day of their lives and may not feel the completeness of baptismal cleansing until heaven.

I see now that we all have stories of where we have been in our lives. I can never know or assume what others have been through. People in churches are often not comfortable talking about our lives to each other. I've been thinking a lot about how the church could be a more open, confessional, and loving place. How can I be there for a person who has been or is involved in prostitution?

Perspective of theology sought for curriculum

David Fredrickson, PhD, associate professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

I had a student who connected what she was learning in my class on the Pauline epistles with what she had learned about commercial sexual exploitation from Al Erickson. The connection she made was that Paul does not treat issues of sex in isolation from issues such as violence and power. This kind of thinking goes hand-in-hand with looking at the issue of prostitution not in terms of personal moral failure, but as power and socio-economic issues.

From the reading I've done, I've been aware of how sex has been a vehicle for domination. This project is actually real life—people's experiences. The curriculum views prostitution in terms of a system that people find themselves in. You see how people become objects. The issue of power or dominance is raised in such a way that shows sex being used as a medium for power.

What I knew about commercial sexual exploitation before was mostly from newspapers and television. I've followed some of the work of Rita Nakashima Brock and read parts of her book *Casting Stones*. * I've seen some interesting programs on TV about prostitution in foreign countries. But I'm not so naive as to think sexual exploitation is just a foreign problem. When I used to see young women on the streets, I would hope they weren't involved in prostitution. Now I assume they are.

I've learned that it's a good idea to start educating children when they are fairly young; to have a positive focus—like where kids can go, who they can trust. I've learned that once someone gets into prostitution, how difficult it is to get out. I now see how important prevention is.

* See The STOP Light, vol 8, 110 1, pg 6.

Curriculum writer brings perspective of pastor, husband, and father of six

Rev. John Bucka, PhD, senior pastor, House of Hope Lutheran, New Hope, Minnesota and writer, Wise as Serpents

I'm committed to helping youth examine their lives and relate their faith to their lives; letting faith change them and influence their decision-making. As the father of six kids, my wife and I are very concerned about the society in which they live; how it devalues human beings and turns them into objects to be abused or misused. I'm concerned that youth of today at times aren't as sensitive to these issues as they could be. I see the Wise as Serpents confirmation resource as an opportunity to raise their consciousness level, lead them to think about how they relate to others and how they behave—to confirm or affirm and strengthen their identity as God's children. They need to be aware of the dangers out there but also of the strength and hope the gospel gives to live as a child of God.

Before writing this curriculum, I knew something about commercial sexual exploitation from having worked with sexually addicted people. But I had no idea about their background and lives, the manipulation and vulnerability that girls as well as boys who enter prostitution encounter and experience.

Writing this curriculum has changed me drastically. I now see the lies more clearly. I' ve become sensitive to television, which exploits us in many respects. I' m offended by radio hosts who think they' re clever in how they describe the world and talk about women. I have little tolerance for it. I used to listen and kind of ignore it as meaningless babble but can no longer.

I' ve learned about the large number of youth who are hurting and at risk, and how we as the church need to embrace them, partner with them, and offer them hope in the pain they experience. Their pain can lead them down horrific avenues where they are greatly harmed. I' ve become more compassionate toward a segment of society I formerly knew nothing about. I' m committed to see what I can do in the parish I serve to address the needs of the people. People need permission, to feel safe, before they will talk about friends or relatives, sons or daughters, fathers or mothers who might be involved in commercial sexual exploitation. It' s more than the folks actively involved who are affected by it.

Writing this curriculum has emphasized the theology of the cross: the Christ who enters into the suffering of humanity; the Christ who himself became vulnerable to the manipulation and abuse of humanity, and the Christ who continues to be with us in a compassionate, loving way. This Christ feels our pain, knows our anguish, and continues to walk with all of us. I' m convinced that Christ continues to give hope through organizations such as A-STOP/ Grassroots Ministry; hope through people who care enough to tell their story whether they used to be pimps or prostitutes.

The sex industry loses some of its power each time we speak out against it. The more we keep it to ourselves, the more power we give that industry. I' m convinced the church is ready to address the issue—that awarding the grant for confirmation materials is an attempt by the church to begin talking about this. We' ve always said that our youth are the church of tomorrow. That' s wrong—they are the church of today. We can' t go on thinking that somehow tomorrow is going to be okay. Things aren' t okay. We as the church can be caring and concerned about youth who are at risk in families that may be hurting. .

Book Review

Child Lures

by Kenneth Wooden

Copyright 1995, 82 pages

As disgusting and unthinkable as it may be, the threat of child sexual abuse is real. The statistics are staggering. In a 1994 National Institute of Health survey, 453 pedophiles were interviewed. Collectively, they confessed to having molested 67,000 children - an average of 148 victims per offender! It is estimated that 20% of girls and 7% of boys will experience some kind of sexual abuse before reaching age 18. As a parent or guardian you want to do everything in your power to keep your child from becoming part of these statistics.

In his book *Child Lures*, Kenneth Wooden provides the best defense against child predators-- knowledge. His research included hundreds of interviews with convicted child molesters incarcerated around the country. This research forms the heart of the book describing 15 "lures" pedophiles use to snare their victims.

Although the information it contains is very valuable, what makes *Child Lures* extremely effective is the format in which the information is presented. The book is meant to be a guide for

parents and children to read together. For this reason half the book is designed for children. The parts aimed at children are shaded and written at a 2nd grade level. If this is too advanced for your children, don' t worry, they should have no trouble understanding the concepts if it is read to them.

Wooden starts by giving instructions on how to use the book and follows that with a description of a molester. He then designates one chapter to each of 15 lures used by molesters, citing how to recognize and avoid them, and ending with simple practice scenarios for parents and kids to try at home.

The half of the book designated for children is written to warn and educate but not frighten them unnecessarily. Throughout the book Wooden continually reassures kids that most adults would never hurt them. On the other hand the parent' s guide is morbidly descriptive, citing actual cases where serial killers used these lures to hook victims. For that reason some parents might feel the need to censor their portion of this book.

You might be wondering why a book on child molestation is being reviewed by a publication focused on prostitution. As it turns out, the two issues are fundamentally related. Statistics show that 85% of all prostitutes were sexually abused as children.

In closing, I have a personal recommendation. If you choose to use this book or any like it, supplement it with books like *Where Did I Come From?* or *What's Happening To Me?* These will provide an up-front description of anatomy and sex as a basis for open dialogue with your child on those subjects. As uncomfortable as these topics may be for you to discuss, it is vital information if your children are to protect themselves from pedophiles. To quote one of the molesters Wooden interviewed, "Give me a kid who knows nothing about sex, and you' ve given me my next victim."

reviewed by Bryn Meyer

Survivor had sheltered childhood

Boarding the bus for Nebraska (or was it Iowa?), Heidi knew her destination was a shabby motel in a rural area. She and the others would stay there after dancing and stripping that night at Mike' s bar. Some of the others were sleeping because there would be no sleep once they arrived. Night meant work; work meant customers-watching and shouting and grabbing and selecting. Heidi tried to sleep, too, but thoughts about getting out were keeping her awake. After ten years on the prostitution circuit, Heidi thought a lot about leaving-and about how it all began.

Heidi grew up in a caring, two-parent family in northern Minnesota. A straight-A student, active in her church youth group, her parents and rural community insulated their kids from the world that surrounded them. She was naive and unprepared when, with a scholarship, she headed off to college in a bigger city.

In college, she found "adult freedom" which led to partying and drinking-which led to date rape. Wounded, feeling guilty and suffering, Heidi didn' t know where to turn. Enter a pimp in the guise of a "boyfriend" who understood and cared about her. He listened and learned her vulnerabilities. She was the perfect target for the emotional manipulation and propaganda that followed; which he skillfully fed her. Her misplaced trust led her to believe his masterful lies. To

pimps, money counts more than human life. Their determination to control is powerful-but disguised as the love and caring that a hurting young person wants and needs.

Today Heidi talks about her years in prostitution to teens in high schools, to women' s groups and college students. She tells them about the early years when she stood on the stage crying and nobody cared. About the insults and coins hurled at her because she wouldn' t do the kind of dancing the men wanted. About the degrading life-style that forced her to harden herself in order to survive... about the scars that still remain.

To Heidi, prevention is vital for two reasons: (1) Once a person is caught in prostitution, regardless if they escape; regardless of the help they receive, they will carry the scars with them always; and (2) Children are being lost every day to the flourishing prostitution industry. Heidi feels kids need more "street smarts" so they can recognize the dangers. Open, honest conversations about prostitution are also needed with parents, school teachers, and church youth groups. Education is the most important thing we can do to prevent kids from becoming involved.

Heidi points out prostitution truths:

- Young people from all segments of society have believed the lies told by those in the \$14 billion-per-year sex industry, and have become entangled in its web of deceit.
- Constant sexual harassment and abuse slowly alters the internal identity of a person in prostitution. They become hard in order to cope.
- Relationships always suffer. Toxic attitudes toward women seep out of strip clubs and into the fabric of our communities.
- Escape from prostitution is difficult and dangerous. If a person is successful in leaving safely, it takes many years to regain a sense of self-worth and dignity.
- Customers are men from every walk of life. They seek selfish sexual gratification-and anonymity.

by Konnie McDermott, A-STOP intern

Young man, you have a life!

Mary frowned when she heard that the church' s confirmation students were going to learn about the sex industry and how to avoid being victimized by sexual exploitation. Why would they need to learn anything about it? After all, the kids came from wonderful families, good homes. It would be a waste of time, and besides, parents want to protect their kids from unpleasant things. What they don' t know won' t hurt them, right? That kind of stuff just happens to bad people who make lousy choices, not to the youth in our church, Mary thought.

So, what do you think? Are they just bad kids who get sexually exploited? Are youth today really safe from the influence of the sex industry? Is it only girls who get into prostitution, who get exploited? Or do boys and young men also get involved?

As a start, let' s consider some of the reasons why our churches' young men and boys need to learn about commercial sexual exploitation. What truths and tools do the Scriptures offer them--and us--in combating this prevalent evil? If information is power, it' s up to us to ensure our youth know enough to protect themselves as they emerge into adulthood.

First of all, let us realize just how dominant the idea of sexual pleasure as entertainment is today. Take a look around. How far do you have to go to find the Internet on a computer, X-rated films at a video store, ads for strip bars or phone sex in the newspaper, yellow pages listing escort services, a sauna, bar or street corner with persons offering sex for sale? Scary how close it really is, isn't it?

Red-blooded all-American boys are immersed in a world where money talks and sex sells. A young man whose body was created to procreate looks around and sees alluring bodies and hears messages everywhere urging him to follow his most animalistic instincts. Meanwhile the church is often silent-as though "boys will be boys" and nothing more can be said.

Is there really nothing more to say? Our young men and boys deserve to hear the following messages:

- Sexual desire is a very strong urge; it is not an unstoppable urge.
- The sex industry operates on the principle that if men can be brought to focus on sexual feelings and desires, proving one's "manhood," and looking good-it'll make lots of money.
- Every male faces situations in life where he could turn off his mind, forget his faith and calling, and just follow his physical desires--hoping no major negative consequences will result. But a man can actually stop to consider and count the cost of following his desires--and decide to take measures that would keep him from further involvement with the sex industry. Jesus put very severe statements in front of us so that we would consider these matters before proceeding. (Matthew 18: 1-11).
- The message is prevalent that being a "man" means being sexual whenever the opportunity presents itself. Some men use this idea to shame boys or confuse them. Self-control, respect for others, and long-term consequences aren't mentioned. A boy is simply put on the spot-will he prove his "manhood" or not? But if a young man would picture his own sister or mother being used as an object for sex, the fallacy of this argument would become apparent.
- One can get into situations or groups where there seems to be nothing a guy can do but go along with the crowd. But a real man can ask himself: "Do I want to be here doing this? Will the boundaries I've set for my life be crossed if I go along with this? Could those I care about most be hurt by what I'm about to do, including myself?"
- There are young Christian men who actively go to strip clubs or download pornography from the Internet. By arguing that it's okay, they reveal that they've believed the messages and myths of the sex industry. What they haven't noticed are the tragedies that have happened already in the lives of those they are using. They don't think about the people in the background who are making money from their behavior by coldly setting these sexual opportunities up for them. (Proverbs 1&2)
- There is a very real possibility of developing habits when young which cannot be easily turned off--which later in life can result in much anguish in a marital relationship and in a father's relationship with his children. Boys age 12 to 17 are the main customers of hard-core pornography. (I John 2:16-17)

- A young girl who is abused may become promiscuous or sell sex without being aware of how the previous abuse is affecting her behavior. We can respect her even though she might not respect herself at this time. She is as much a child of God as Jesus recognized in the cheating tax collector Zaccheus. (Luke 19:1-10)
- Like quicksand, the sex industry can pull us slowly and gently into a world we least expect, that we are not ready for, and which may seem so pleasant at first. The harm it causes is not immediately apparent. Jesus asks us to be smart and think about outcomes before stepping in. He understands that our human inclinations can lead us down a wide path towards immediate gratification and long term destruction. (Matthew 7:13-14)
- As with young women, many young men are also vulnerable. Fear, taunts, bullying, lies, and myths drive them to follow others. Some boys are harassed, abused, raped, put down or made objects of derision. This can lead them to situations of trying to make it on their own in the world. They may feel forced to sell their bodies for food or shelter. Feelings of shame and lack of options may keep them doing something they never intended. Drugs may lessen pain but keep them trapped.

In Scriptures, John Mark, the young cousin of Barnabas, went off on a tough mission with Paul. John Mark had grown up in comfortable conditions. (Acts 12:12-15) This mission proved to be more than he bargained for and he dropped out halfway through the trip. He was not ready to deal with what he faced. Will you be like Barnabas who saw John Mark through to maturity? (Colossians 4:10) Others didn' t have the time or patience to stay with him through those tumultuous years.

Readers, look around you. How many vulnerable young men and boys do you know who may be vulnerable to this kind of treachery? Your consistent support and interest in his life can make a difference. Listen to him, talk with him, encourage his progress, acknowledge his accomplishments, don' t ignore nonsense or inappropriateness don' t be harsh, pray for and with him.

Young man, you have a life. In it you can create joy--or pain. Being a man means creating and building healthy relationships over a long period of time. If you treasure your life and what you have to give the world but have strayed, be forgiven and forgive yourself. Find out where you need to go and how to get there. Begin building a life that will make you, your family, and your future family proud.

by Al Erickson, founder and director of A-STOP and Grassroots Ministry Alliance