

The STOPLight

Volume 1, Number 1

July 2002 Women of the ELCA Fifth Triennial Gathering – Special Edition

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.

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The mission of Adults Saving Kids is to prevent commercial sexual exploitation, bringing honor and accountability to all relationships.

Lutheran women saving kids

Adults Saving Kids is partnering with Women of the ELCA synodical organizations to prevent the exploitation of young people. In this STOP Light, seven synods share what they have been doing.

Each of these synods is seeking to rebuild the walls of safety for youth. Adults Saving Kids has developed a three-pronged approach to doing this:

1. Training speakers to spread a message of prevention in churches, schools, and community groups;
2. Having each congregational unit pray for youth in the congregation; and
3. Having each congregation use *Wise as Serpents* with the confirmands.

Each synod is asked to have a team of three people, each responsible for a different aspect of the project.

Synodical organizations who are interested in being involved with this effort are invited to contact Adults Saving Kids.

Northeastern Minnesota 3-E

The children in our synod live in a sheltered environment; they are not street smart. When they get exposed to manipulative, crafty people, they can get drawn into deep water before they know they are in trouble.

We as Christian women have an obligation to these children because they belong to the same family, created by God. Our kids are too valuable to let predators have a chance at them. If we educate the kids, make them street smart, with love and acceptance not condemnation, we can make a difference.

About ten years ago, Al Erickson was the keynote speaker at our convention. We have had workshops most years since then as well as other educational events. Many conferences and congregational units have supported Adults Saving Kids financially. It has been difficult to get women to commit to working on a long-term project, however.

That changed recently when a local TV station did a story about the prostitution of young women on ships in the Duluth harbor. All of a sudden this was our problem, not someone else's. Women from our churches started to say, "We can't allow this. Something has to be done."

Now we have put together a team of two, a Speaker Coordinator and a Wise as Serpents Coordinator, who will focus on the Duluth area. We would like each conference to have one, preferably two complete teams working to bring information to the churches and communities. Out of our convention, we have additional names of women in other conferences who would like to work on this.

We need to make our churches a safe place where children can learn the truth and know that they are loved, protected, and valued. We can't let the predators have our kids anymore.

For more information, contact Ilene Chapman, 218/568-5782.

Northern Great Lakes 5-G

Our synodical board, after sending two women to Minneapolis to learn about Adults Saving Kids, voted in March 2001 to get involved in the saving of our kids from sexual exploitation.

Amy Hartman was our keynote speaker and workshop leader at our Synodical Convention in October 2001. Amy gave Ruth Snyder (Speaker Coordinator), Dolores Bardon (Wise as Serpents Coordinator), and Nicole Bardon (Dolores' daughter) a chance to share their involvement. Nicole told her story of being raped shortly after starting college, by someone who slipped a date rape drug into her soda. Her story brought the message of sexual exploitation home to the audience, letting them know that this happens in their synod.

Since that convention, Jeanette Kuzeij joined the team as the Prayer Coordinator. In April, we held a weekend training event for speakers, prayer, and Wise as Serpents. In November 2002 we are having another training using the same format.

Six women attended the speaker training. Speakers have done two "temple talks," as well as presentations at congregational units and cluster training events. Ruth and Marie Fries spoke at Women and Kids week in June. We did a workshop at the Synod Assembly and will do more at the Synodical Convention in October.

We have a prayer group established in at least two churches and have some names to start another one. We have done a couple Wise as Serpents introductions. We have one congregation that presented Wise as Serpents to the youth at a weekend retreat, which received good reviews from the youth.

We have also been working with the Synod to start a subcommittee under the Synod Justice Advocacy Committee. The Bishop and his Assistant are working very closely with us. We really look forward to expanding our activities within our Synod.

For more information, contact Ruth Snyder at 906/387-3120.

Montana 1-F

In October of 2000, two synodical board members attended an Adults Saving Kids training in Minneapolis. They returned "on fire" for a project to prevent the exploitation of our youth. The synodical board voted to partner with Adults Saving Kids and spread the word throughout our synod. Pastor Al and Ina Erickson gave a presentation to officers of each cluster in March of 2001, and these officers shared with their groups, laying the groundwork for workshops at the biennial fall convention. At t. convention, the Ericksons presented prayer and informational workshops.

Interested people signed up to start prayer projects in their units, to be trained as speakers, and to encourage churches to use Wise as Serpents.

At the present time, we have four persons trained as speakers. We ha. given presentations to a number of groups. We gave two workshops at the Montana LYO gathering in November 2001, and we spoke to Bible study groups and spring gathering events for the women. A "senior citizens" group invited our speakers because they wanted to know what they could do as seniors to educate the young people and help them to be alert to the predators in our made a presentation to parents from various churches in a small community. They in turn are interested in a speakers' training and prayer projects.

At the present time, 47 units (1/3 of our churches) have begun prayer projects in their congregations. Some churches are praying daily not only for teens, but for children from the cradle through college. Every unit in our synod is encouraged to include a prayer project for their youth, and by year' s end we hope to be up to 100%. Another goal is to have speakers in each cluster.

For more information, contact Dawn Petty at 406/373-6673.

North Carolina 9-B

We have a clear message from Jesus -children are precious. There are many people who choose not to heed the word of the Lord, and they exploit children by luring them into the "sex" industry.

In response to this exploitation, the North Carolina Women of the ELCA have formed an alliance with Adults Saving Kids to support and promote the "wall of safety" for kids across North Carolina. Three board members, Sharon Johnson, Carrie Graves, and Cathy Sell, attended a training for synod teams May 16-19, 2002. They returned with much information and dedication teachers, parents and kids to the perils of commercial sexual exploitation.

Rev. Al and Ina Erickson, who founded Adults Saving Kids, presented an awareness session at our Synodical Women' s Gathering, June 8. They also held two informational sessions -one for youth advisors and another for pastors and anyone interested in "Prayer Project Lifesaver." While in NC, the Ericksons visited several people and agencies that also work on this problem.

Our Adults Saving Kids team is creating a plan of action. We are concentrating our efforts in the Southern Conference. We will contact congregations to set up "Prayer Project Lifesaver" with the goal of having someone praying for every child in the conference. We will hold sessions for pastors, youth directors, and teachers to introduce Wise as Serpents. In January, 2003 we will have a training session for speakers, who will be available to speak to congregations, community groups, and schools.

Together we can build this "wall of safety" for our children and grandchildren. It is vital to their survival -and ours -for our children are our future.

For more information, contact Cathy Sell at 704/938-5029.

"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me, but the one who sent me." Mark 9:37

Western North Dakota 3-A

Our synod has approximately 29,000 students, ages 12-18. They are our future, and we care about them as God' s children. Because of this, we are concerned about materials that once would have been considered immoral are now acceptable and are printed in women' s magazines, shown on television and in the movies, and used in advertising.

Out of this concern, the Women of the ELCA of WND worked with Adults Saving Kids to start the SEE (Stop Exploitation Early) Project. We want to make our people, young and old, aware of what is happening and help them become part of the solution in prevention.

Our progress has been exciting. We have traveled hundreds of miles, speaking to approximately 800 people. We have written articles in newsletters, sent letters, and distributed hundreds of copies of the ELCA Message on Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

We have found pastors, leaders, women, and men who are supportive of our project. We have found people who remain "on the fence." Sexual exploitation is not an easy topic for some people to discuss or even to hear about.

A woman made a donated a quilt to our SEE Project. One church has started a Friday prayer connection. Many churches have purchased the Wise as Serpents materials, and about three dozen have started prayer projects.

Our future plans involve speaking to youth groups, providing training for speakers, encouraging more churches to purchase Wise as Serpents, and involving more churches in the prayer projects.

Our SEE team has three members, each with a specific role. Any of us may be contacted for more information about our project.

Barb Gullickson – Speaker Coordinator, 701/537-2866

Leone Bolinske - Wise as Serpents Coordinator, 701/839-5442

Sharon St. Aubin – Prayer Coordinator, 701/537-5713.

Southwestern Minnesota 3-F

Our synodical women' s organization has been working with Adults Saving Kids since 1995. During this long partnership, we have supported this program financially, attended trainings, assisted with training events for pastors, had speakers give presentations in churches, schools, and workshops at synodical conventions.

Last year we formed a team of three women to implement prayer for youth in every congregation, train additional speakers, and have congregations use Wise as Serpents with their youth: Janice

Franck (Prayer Coordinator), Mata Carlson (Speaker Coordinator), and Ilene Penk (Wise as Serpents Coordinator.)

The best way to rebuild the walls of safety is to be praying for the youth. It is a challenge to get this project into every congregation. We made a brochure explaining the prayer project, which we made available at the synodical convention. Carol Etter and Janice are willing to speak about the prayer project at unit meetings in the Watonwan Conference.

We also need people to speak about the dangers in prostitution. We have been raising our children to be nice to all people and haven' t realized that doing this can make our kids vulnerable.

Mata has been speaking in schools and other places about what young people are exposed to and how easy it is for them to become trapped. When students first hear her topic, they snicker and laugh. But by the end, they want more information and wonder why more isn' t being done to stop this from happening.

Our synod has several congregations that already have Wise as Serpents. Ilene has led the Wise as Serpents course with the youth in her congregation. A neighboring congregation invited her to lead it with their youth. We are working with Adults Saving Kids to develop a team of pastors who can help get other pastors trained in using this resource.

For more information, contact Janice Franck at 507/632-4201.

LaCrosse Area 5-L

The Adults Saving Kids movement really picked up steam after the fourth Women' s Triennial Convention when some women from the LaCrosse Area Synod heard Heidi speak about how she had been lured into the sex industry. After that our women' s synodical organization board decided to go forth boldly and send women to be trained to address the dangers of sexual exploitation.

In November 2001, two women went to the "Leading for our Kids" training put on by Adults Saving Kids. Karen Birkedal and Mary Molstad, who had never met, made a weekend journey begun by faith, with complete faith that the Lord was in control. After that training, we identified Karen as the Prayer Coordinator and Mary as the Speaker Coordinator.

We met with the assistant to the Bishop to plan a course of action. First we presented to conference pastors, so they would have an understanding of the program and its objectives.

Since those meetings, our efforts have been led by the Spirit in many directions. We have started prayer projects in churches. We have spoken to units of the Women of the ELCA, adult forums, adult studies, youth at our Synod Assembly, Adult Vacation Bible School, Women' s Night Out, and had displays at both the Synod Assembly and the Women of the ELCA Synod Convention.

On one Sunday we were humbled to be asked to present at a worship service in lieu of the sermon -God be praised!

In January 2002, the Lord blessed us with the addition of Rev. Steve Meyer as our Wise As Serpents Coordinator. Our team was now complete and this addition enabled us to schedule a pastors' training.

We are constantly overwhelmed at what God has done and have realized that even roadblocks are turned into great opportunities. May God be glorified!!

For more information, contact Mary Molstad at 608/634-2367.

Thank you...

To Wheat Ridge Ministries and Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Minneapolis for supporting the Wise as Serpents Alliance Project.

To Thrivent Financial Services for Lutherans and those who donated to our challenge grant last fall, for supporting the training of speakers in the synods mentioned in this article.

Wise as Serpents is a Christian six-lesson course for grades 7, 8, and 9. It helps young people be more aware of how they may be recruited by exploiters and how they can keep themselves safe.

Special agent speaks out

This is an interview with Ann Quinn-Robinson, a special agent with the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA). She investigates juvenile prostitution cases.

What is the role of the BCA?

The BCA is the state police agency. The main responsibility of the BCA is homicide and narcotics investigation.

A few years ago there was an investigation into a large-scale prostitution ring operated by the Evans family, based out of Minneapolis. Their method was to recruit kids off the street and take them across state lines to work in escort services, hotels, and strip clubs as prostitutes. That investigation brought to light that we had quite a problem of juvenile prostitution throughout the state of Minnesota, and it was basically untouched. The state awarded a grant to the BCA to work on this problem, and my position is the result of that grant.

Juvenile prostitution was untouched because resources were not allocated to work on it. As a result, it reached epidemic proportions. Do you close your eyes and say it is out of my control or do you try to do something about it? The BCA is trying to do something.

What does the problem of juvenile prostitution look like in Minnesota?

I would estimate there are at least a thousand children, probably many more, in the state of Minnesota at any given time that are in prostitution. It is a hard problem to tap because oftentimes the kids will run away from their rural areas and head into the city, hook up with a pimp, be in prostitution for a few weeks then go back home. They will leave home again, head back to the city, and again be in prostitution. Sometimes that goes unreported because the kids are just assumed to be runaways and no one delves into what they have been doing in the Twin Cities.

Prostitution goes on in all parts of the state. It goes on in farming communities where farmers will actually prostitute their daughters. It goes on in small communities where you see the strip clubs; those are often covers for prostitution. Pimps will go there to recruit girls and provide them with fake ID's. The owners think they are getting an adult or they don't check out ID's and then the prostitution goes on with the stripping. Owners will say, "We just have a strip club. This is 'adults only.' This is legal in the state of Minnesota." But they also add, "We don't really care what the girls do when they are off duty. That has no relation to my club." Well that is absolutely untrue because contacts with the prostitution customers are made within the strip club.

There is a pipeline that generally travels through the states along the Mississippi River, where kids will travel from Minnesota to those states and back. Sometimes girls in the northern part of the state will end up in Canada, actually taken across country lines. New York City used to be a hotbed for our juveniles. I think they still go there, but the awareness has really helped cut down on kids going there, because they know they are going to be hopped on by the local cops.

Because of my job being developed and the awareness throughout the country, pimps have had to change their method of operation. We are trying to shake them up and let them know that victimizing our youth is not going to be tolerated.

I'll add that this is not unique to Minnesota. It is going on all over.

What is needed for law enforcement to work better on this issue?

There needs to be tougher penalties for those who are caught promoting prostitution. Promotion of juvenile prostitution is a presumptive prison sentence, so the first time you are caught you are going to prison. It isn't that way for adults. We know that those who are pimping adults are also pimping juveniles. A mandatory prison sentence for pimping adults would be a big step.

Publication of the johns we catch would also help. Who would want to have his name published for being a customer of prostitution? Many of these guys are married men, and they don't want their wives to know what they are doing.

Improving communication between law enforcement in several states is one of our priorities. We want to keep better track of which pimps and girls have been in which states. That way we can figure out the trends in different states, so we know what might be coming our way.

What recruitment tactics have you seen?

The pimps are really good at recruiting kids, whether it is the kids who are the throwaway children, those with a multitude of problems, or those that appear to be normal. They know what to say to make the kids comfortable.

A pimp or a recruiter for the pimp - maybe someone that is the juvenile's age - will approach a juvenile. That person very quickly becomes a boyfriend or a good friend. He or she starts having the juvenile spend the night at his or her house. Within two or three days, the kid is involved in prostitution.

Pimps will find out what is going on at home and play off of that. They may say, "Your parents don't like you. I like you. I'm the only one who cares about you."

The pimps tell them, "I'll buy whatever you want." They flash big rolls of money, fancy clothes right away. They get the kids' nails and hair done. The kids just think this is an easy way to make money, and they also don't think it is that big of a deal until they are really caught up in it.

If the girl wants to leave, the pimp will say, "Nobody wants you back. You can't leave. Your family won't want you now. If you tell your family, I will kill them." The kids believe the threats. They don't want their parents to know or their family to get hurt, so they don't leave.

Pimps will tell the girls, "You don't have to use other parts of your body. Just use your mouth. Sometimes people just use their hands." I've had juveniles tell me, "I'm not having sex, so I'm not a prostitute." They may be giving hand jobs or having oral sex, but the kids don't consider that sex. They don't think they are in prostitution because they are not actually having vaginal intercourse with these pimps or with these johns.

How can we prevent kids from being recruited?

Communities need to be aware of the vulnerable kids. A lot of prostitution have had some sort of physical or sexual abuse or severe psychological problems. A lot of these kids are throwaway kids that no one wants anything to do with, and prostitution is a means of survival for them. There are kids however from seemingly good families that end up, for whatever reason, falling prey to the pimps.

Be aware of where kids hang out. Pimps will go where the kids are, and one of the biggest recruiting grounds are malls, in any part of the state. Of special concern in the Twin Cities are malls where kids from all over the state come to hang out. If you work at a mall, be aware of who is hanging out there. Let the police know if something looks suspicious.

If you have a friend who has a run-away daughter or son -males also get into prostitution -direct them to an appropriate social service agency. Perhaps the child may be involved in prostitution, especially if they're heading to the city.

If you suspect your child is in prostitution, call your local police, a social worker, or school counselor. If the kid is on probation, call the probation officer and report the behaviors you are seeing.

People can also call me directly. I will refer them to their local police and assist that agency. I am the only person assigned state-wide to do this, so my plate is really full. That doesn't mean I won't assist and give advice.

What keeps you going in your work?

I like putting predators in prison, especially those who prey on children. Kids are our future, and what will happen if we're not working to save them?

Ann Quinn-Robinson may be contacted at:

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Wise women urgently needed

Back in 1993 a mother told me how her daughter's boyfriend had kept telling her daughter to "show a little skin" and how he had manipulated her into becoming a stripper. Now, nine years later, the fashion industry and the media have pimped their way into the life of American teenagers such that showing more skin is the thing to do. In fact, as one high school girl told me, pimping is a common word among the boys of her school, and a boy who is known as a pimping guy is looked up to in many cases. Our youth culture has changed, readers. It is time to wake up.

If it is the task of the "sex" industry to ruin the lives of youth, they have done their job exceedingly well. We now have over 300,000 pornographic web sites, which actually means 300,000 terrorists attacking our youth, with 6,500,000 American young people reporting receiving unwanted sexual material. Terrorists scope out vulnerability in order to destroy lives. This is exactly what the pornographers, strip club managers and other pimping operations do. Only they do not do it for the sake of any belief system but simply to make money. Lives taken for \$\$\$\$.

On September 10, 2001 researchers at the University of Pennsylvania announced this tragedy: Between 200,000 and 300,000 American juveniles are caught in the trap of being used sexually for money. That means for every person who lost his or her life in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, over 60 American youth are exploited day-in and day-out by American citizens. How many of us have the audacity and mean spiritedness to not even notice this new form of child sacrifice going on in our midst?

Maybe you are thinking, "Oh, no, it is not like that." Then I ask you to wake up and smell the roses on the reputations and graves of American youth who have met up with these predators only to discover too late what they were in for. American youth are being taught to use sex as a drug; to believe stripping is a career choice with no life-altering consequences; and that buying sexual "entertainment" has no long term effects on either the worker or the customer. The tragedies coming out of these deceptions and lies can hardly be overstated.

Can this be turned around where love and relationships and safety become a way of life?

Can we recover at all what it means to be a human being in the face of this? For that to happen we will need some very wise and courageous people and at first, these will need to be women.

The Old Testament, which is very patriarchal, even shows this. We only need to look at the experience of King David. Before he became king, he reacted furiously to a man named Nabal who refused him and his men food after they had done a favor for him. It was the quick-thinking Abigail, Nabal's wife, who calmed David down and kept him from doing something really foolish. (See I Samuel 25:1-42).

David gullibly did not see a scheme which set up his own daughter, Tamar, to be raped by her half brother Amnon. It was Tamar before and after the rape who spoke words of wisdom to Amnon. She was the one who saw the horrible outcome of this for everyone concerned and

spoke wisely and plainly. No matter that none of the men in the story listened to her. She, at least, saw the tragedy forthcoming and spoke to it.

So in two years, Amnon was murdered by Absalom, Tamar' brother. Then Absalom tragically got caught up in the refusal of David to see him and ended up being killed himself. (See 2 Samuel 13 -18).

We need wise women today who speak boldly and passionately for the lives of our young people. We need wise women who are willing and able to look beyond the immediate game, the cheap thrill, to see what this is all leading to. We men are slower on the uptake on these issues. Some of us will come along and some have. But women must be the Abigails, the Tamars, the Esthers if we are going to change people' s minds and hearts.

We have seen wise women boldly accept a leadership partnership with Adults Saving Kids. Out of their leadership, congregations and communities are praying for their youth.

Pastors are waking up to this tragedy and equipping their youth using our materials and videos.

Women are making new contacts with law enforcement and community agencies.

Women are calling forth leadership in the church. Seminaries are addressing these difficult issues. Bishops are getting involved.

All this because some women had the fortitude and compassion in Christ to step out and change the course the river was running.

Sisters listen, God is calling! The lives of the children in your area are in your hands. You can make a difference. Accept the challenge, the responsibility, the calling, and watch God bless your salty leadership. The meal is there to be cooked. Cook it. The garment is there to be sewn. Sew it. Adults Saving Kids is looking for wise women to step forward and reverse the ongoing destruction of our young people. Reverse it!!

by Rev. Al Erickson, director and founder

START praying for our youth!

STOP the preying on our youth.