

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE CHURCH

A FABLE

One day in a land far away there lived a community of people of all ages: men, women and children.

Each week they would meet together to talk, sing and pray, enjoy each other's help and support, and share a meal together. Though they lived in their own different houses, because they met together regularly they felt as if they belonged.

Sometimes small groups of them would spend time together during the week. Sometimes they would leave their work in order to help someone else or to help someone who needed help from outside their community.

One day the leaders of the community decided it was time to invite to their community a Person Who Cares and Inspires, someone who would help them to do things they couldn't do themselves and to give them new ideas for living together as a community.

So they invited a Person Who Cares and Inspires from another place, one who was known to be

trusted, caring and loyal. A big celebration was held to welcome the Person Who Cares and Inspires and the people of the community were glad that there was

One day, the leaders decided to invite to their community a Person Who Cares and Inspires . . .

now someone who could show them how to care for each other better and give them new ideas for living together.

The Person Who Cares and Inspires worked hard in his new community. He visited all the families and those who lived alone. He listened to their stories and shared his own. He visited those who were sick, buried those who had died, and org-

anised groups within the community to have meals together. Week by week when the community gathered together, the Person Who Cares and Inspires would speak to the assembly, giving them ideas and helping them to understand how they could live well together.

Even though not everyone always agreed with everything the Person Who Cares and Inspires had to say, the community trusted his desire to do good and appreciated his hard work. Year by year the Person Who Cares and Inspires lived with the community and he found a warm place within their hearts.

What was not known by the community and its leaders, however, was that the Person Who Cares and Inspires also liked to fondle and force himself on women, something that was considered wrong by the whole community.

He knew that if this was discovered by the community it would destroy the warm place he held within their hearts, so the Person Who Cares and Inspires

kept it secret, disguised his actions and only fondled and forced himself on women he knew wouldn't tell.

So when no one else was around, he would look for a Woman Alone.

Sometimes they were Women Alone who needed his caring: sometimes they were Women Alone who needed his help with work they had to do.

Because they knew that he was the Person Who Cares and Inspires, the Women Alone at first allowed him to come close. When he came close, however, the Person Who Cares and Inspires changed, and rather than caring and helping the Women Alone he began to force himself on them.

When this happened, each Woman Alone was hurt and confused.

Because they hadn't heard about this happening to anyone else, at first they thought they must have been mistaken. They could not understand how the Person Who Cares and Inspires whom they knew and loved and had listened to over and over speaking kindly in the assembly could hurt and try to possess them in this way.

Some of them thought they must have done something wrong and that the Person Who Cares and Inspires was punishing them for being bad and weak. Some of them thought they must have done something that made the Person Who Cares and Inspires think they wanted to be hurt, forced and fondled.

Some of the Women Alone felt dirty and wanted to talk to someone who cares and inspires about it, but felt too ashamed. Some of them felt betrayed because they had trusted the Person Who Cares and Inspires with their deepest secrets.

They did not know they were

not the only person to feel this way, and their feeling of hurt went deep.

It was difficult for each Woman Alone to know what to do. Some became afraid to be alone with the Person Who Cares and Inspires and would take great care to make sure someone else was always around. Some Women Alone learned not to let the Person Who Cares and In-

When he came close to the women, the Person Who Cares and Inspires changed . . . and he began to force himself on them.

spires too close and learned how to move quickly.

Several of the Women Alone told the Person Who Cares and Inspires they didn't want to be forced and fondled, and while he didn't do it with them again they found that they had lost the help of a person who cares and inspires. Some Women Alone wanted to tell someone else in the community but were afraid that they wouldn't be believed or that they would damage the good reputation of the Person Who Cares and Inspires. Some Women Alone found it so difficult they decided to move away and not live in the community anymore.

Meanwhile the Person Who Cares and Inspires continued his good work and many people loved him, and were helped and inspired by him.

One day two of the Women Alone began to talk to each other. They were surprised to find that the same thing had happened to them both and that they had felt the same hurt and confusion. Carefully they began to talk to some other Women Alone and found others whom the Person Who Cares and Inspires had also tried to force and fondle.

They were surprised to find that even though several of the Women Alone had told the Person Who Cares and Inspires that it hurt them when he tried to possess them, he still kept trying it with other Women Alone. In order to protect other Women Alone from being hurt, the Women Together decided to go to the leaders of the community.

At first the leaders of the community did not believe the Women Together and they too were confused. They could not believe that the Person Who Cares and Inspires whom they loved and admired would deliberately force and try to hurt some people.

Some of the leaders said the Women Alone must have misunderstood what had happened because the Person Who Cares and Inspires was so good in caring and inspiring.

Some of the leaders wanted the Women Alone to handle it themselves, but the Women Together said they had done that and still the hurt went on.

Some of the leaders tried to blame the Women Alone for making the Person Who Cares and Inspires hurt and fondle them.

Some leaders who were Women Alone themselves would not believe it because it hadn't happened to them.

It was only when the Women Together told their stories and painfully showed the leaders their

scars, that the leaders realised that the Person Who Cares and Inspires whom they loved and trusted also secretly hurt. He tried to force himself on some Women Alone and they had to do something about it.

So the leaders spoke to the Person Who Cares and Inspires. At first the Person Who Cares and Inspires denied what was said.

He said that the Women Alone must have misunderstood what he had done, and that he was really only trying to care and help them.

But as the leaders told him about the scars they had seen and that nobody else in the community had those scars, the Person Who Cares and Inspires decided that it was time that he left the community.

When the members of the community heard that the Person Who Cares and Inspires whom they loved and trusted was leaving, they went to him and asked him why he had to go. He told them that he was tired from working so hard caring and inspiring the community and that it was time for him to have a rest. He also told some members of the community that other members had not liked his caring and had made it difficult for him to stay.

A celebration was held to farewell the Person Who Cares and Inspires, as is done in many communities. Many were sad that he was leaving and spoke warmly

of the caring and inspiration they had received from the Person Who Cares and Inspires, as was only right.

The women who had been hurt bore their pain in silence . . .

The leaders also spoke of his caring and inspiration. Even though they knew what he had done was wrong and was leaving for other reasons, they didn't tell the truth because they didn't want others to know that something had gone wrong in their community, and they didn't want those who loved and trusted the Person Who Cares and Inspires to be hurt, and they wanted to protect the reputation of the Person Who Cares and Inspires.

As the farewell was held, the Women Alone who had been hurt by the Person Who Cares and Inspires bore their pain in silence. They felt angry because they knew that other women also had been deliberately hurt in secret and that they were not being told the truth.

They also felt betrayed because the leaders of the community did not acknowledge their hurt, but praised the Person who

had hurt them for his caring and helpfulness. Several of the Women Together wanted to tell the community the truth, but they knew that they would not be heard with the same respect as the Person Who Cares and Inspires who spoke so kindly to the assembly each week.

They also knew that many members of the community wouldn't believe them and would probably get angry with them because they spoke badly about the Person Who Cares and Inspires whom the people loved and trusted, and made him leave.

To this day, many members of the community believe that the Person Who Cares and Inspires left the community because some spiteful women forced him to do so.

In another land far away there lived another community of people. One day the leaders of the community decided it was time to invite to their community a Person Who Cares and Inspires, someone who would help them to do things they couldn't do themselves and to give them new ideas for living together as a community.

So they invited to their midst a Person Who Cares and Inspires, one who had just been warmly farewelled from another community and who was known to be trusted, caring and loyal . . .

The author of this article prefers to remain anonymous.

Pontius' Puddle

