

An Open Letter to The Living Word Fellowship Congregation from Shalom Abrahamson-Caples

**#metoo #churchtoo #thelivingwordfellowshiptoo #tlwftoo #rickholbrooktoo**

Why am I writing this open letter to The Living Word Fellowship (TLWF) congregation?

1. A real problem exists, even after removing Rick Holbrook from the ministry and those in power should be held accountable.
2. I can no longer carry these secrets and their shame and I want to be free of the damage of these abuses.
3. I want the other girls and women and men and children who have also been abused to know that they are not alone. I am not being brave, I just believe that the truth will set me free and hopefully provide a way, a safe way, for others to come forth with their truth and be set free.
4. To start living unapologetically without regrets although I do not know if that is possible because exposing this truth is embarrassing to me and hurtful to many others. I was too trusting and allowed people to control my life decisions that in return hurt me and others around me. I was fearful and intimidated and even worse, I believed they were the only way to God, "Christ in the flesh". I was raised in The Living Word Fellowship from age 3-35 yo and I did not know other Christian churches or Christian ways, but I am no longer fearful or intimidated. I am free.

What do I hope will come from this open letter?

1. I hope **every single person in the TLWF congregation will read the attached letters** that I wrote and delivered to Steve Seboldt, Matt & Margo Walkoe, and Gary & Marilyn Hargrave in the early 2000's telling them of some of the sexual abuse I suffered at the hands of Rick Holbrook and the emotional abuse I suffered at the hands of pastors/shepherds/leaders who didn't question him but blamed me, silenced me, shamed me for speaking out against Rick, and sent me to a psychiatrist for possible chemical imbalance to be medicated. I did see a MFT and he wanted to write up his clinical impressions for my pastors to see. I am attaching his letter as well.
2. I hope **TLWF APCO pastors/shepherds/leadership will hold themselves accountable to the congregation**. I hope Gary Hargrave, Matt Walkoe, Scott McDonald, and everyone else who were told or witnessed sexual grooming and abuse to acknowledge that they did not help the victims, including myself, but instead they kept the victims silent and kept the abusers in power.
3. I hope the congregation can now be safe from any type of abuse (sexual, emotional, spiritual) and if any one person comes forward with allegations, I hope they can be heard by a hired outside party like **GRACE** <http://www.netgrace.org/how-we-help>, to investigate and find the truth to help change the culture of silencing the victim and enabling the abuser that is so deeply rooted in TLWF. **It's beyond Rick Holbrook, it is a culture of abuse and enablers.**
4. TLWF leadership asked the congregation on 10/21/18 to pray about moving Scott McDonald to Grants Pass, Oregon to pastor the local community church. I hope **the congregation will speak up and tell the leadership to NOT move Scott McDonald to Grants Pass Oregon**. Scott was Rick's best friend since childhood and was there when Rick sexually groomed me at inappropriate drinking parties when I was a teenager. Scott and Rick told me to move from Iowa

to California to be with them because it was the will of God for me to do so. Scott was there when Rick would comment to the young men in our church about how he “accidentally” walked into my church summer camp dorm room and saw me nude and that I have the best ass and legs and boobs in the church and was “the catch of the 90s”. Scott was there when Rick told me it should have been me who married him instead of his 3<sup>rd</sup> wife and Scott agreed. Scott witnessed Rick threaten me with his hand squeezing my upper thigh and told me “You will be a good wife one day and you will make a man very happy one day”. I would cry and plead to Scott asking him to make it stop and not let Rick touch me or say those things to me and every single time Scott said that I was being too sensitive and not thinking about it the right way due to the sexual abuse I went through when I was a young child. Scott was my pastor, my spiritual father and mentor, he was also an enabler and a protector of a sexual predator. **Scott should not be moved to another church to pastor, he should be removed from the ministry altogether.**

**The following is shameful and embarrassing and it’s hard to share details, but I believe the truth will set me free and that it will give a voice to the other girls and women who were sexually groomed and abused by Rick Holbrook, including all three of his ex-wives and his current wife (whom I and many others in the church witnessed her sexual grooming when she was 14/15yo; Rick was 36/37 yo at the time and married to his third wife).**

I was 14/15 yo the first time Rick Holbrook sexually groomed me. He was 29/30. I was invited by Rick to join him and a few of his closest friends/pastors in an apartment behind the church’s library, the “200 wing” in Shiloh, Iowa. There was music and drinking. There were two rooms in the church apartment and I was in the front room with Rick with at least two other young girls who were 18/19 yo, the other adults were in the back room. I remember thinking I was too young to be there and I didn’t understand why I was there except that Rick wanted me there and I felt “so special” to be there even though I was confused and felt scared, terrified at one time, and just overall shocked with what I was seeing and wondering why no one else was shocked like me. I was sitting on a chair on one side of the room and Rick was sitting on a couch on the opposite side of the room. He was looking straight at me but I don’t remember what he said to me. I remember the first girl sitting on top of Rick’s lap and dry-humping him. He was enjoying himself and it seemed like she was too. I remember the first girl grabbing the other girl (who ended up becoming his third wife years later) and put her on Rick’s lap and she did not like it, she seemed very uncomfortable and sad and shy. I remember her looking and acting the same way I was. I remember Rick looking straight at me which is when I became terrified. I thought they were going to put me on his lap next and I did not want to sit on his lap and I knew if I did he would touch me and I would be sitting on his penis and he was an adult and I was a kid and I knew what that meant, but I wasn’t put on his lap. I don’t remember moving from that chair until the party was over or until I was told to leave. I was still in shock and I do not remember talking to any other adult about the party. I was just so thankful I didn’t get put in his lap.

I was 15/16 yo the first time Rick Holbrook sexually abused me during the church summer camp (Young Adult Summer Program YASP) in Shiloh, Iowa. He was 30/31. There were several teenage girls in my dorm room. We were sleeping when the Young Adult Summer Program leader (the same girl who sat in his lap and is currently a prominent pastor in TLWF) brought Rick into our dorm room and my breasts were exposed while I was laying in my bed. I remember being frozen, embarrassed, feeling stupid that I was exposed to them. I remember being scared b/c I didn’t want him to see me nude. I remember the YASP leader bragging to Rick that we (all the girls, all the YASPers) would do anything she said. I remember that I couldn’t open my eyes because I was scared for them to know that I knew they were in there. My eyes were shut and my breasts were touched. As time went by (many years) I told myself he didn’t see me and I was not touched. I told myself for so long that it didn’t happen and I blocked it out

until I was 21 when Rick talked about it at The Living Word Publishing building in front of other church members telling them he “accidentally” walked into my YASP dorm room and “saw” me nude when I was young and how perky and nice my boobs were. I was humiliated and embarrassed and shocked that he talked about it in front of people, but mostly I was angry that no one stood up for me or asked if I was ok.

I was 19/20yo when I left the church and moved out of Shiloh to Iowa City. Rick Holbrook and Scott McDonald asked me to dinner when they came out from LA to host Shiloh’s July 4th amphitheater show and once again I felt “so special” that they would take time out of the show to drive to Iowa City to have dinner with me so I could tell them why I left Shiloh. We had dinner and I told them why I left. I also told them about my boyfriend and what a wonderful person he was to me and that I loved him. They said, you do not love him you just like to be in love to be in love and he was not the man for me and not the man I was to marry. They said Shiloh was not my home that I did not belong there and I needed to come to TLW building and “back to my roots” with them at TLW and they would be my pastors and bring me back into the “family” and into a deeper relationship with God. I didn’t want to leave my boyfriend but I wanted to be in a closer relationship with God and I missed worship and the word so I moved back to CA in 1/1995 under their leadership.

The sexual abuses continued from age 21-25 yo and some are outlined in my attached 2001 letter. The sexual abuses basically stopped when I finally told Rick in private that if he touched me or talked to me like that again I would “punch him in the f\*cking face”, but the emotional abuse and retaliation through the church shepherding never stopped until I left TLWF.

I feel that I should add the following definitions because in my process of opening up to close friends and family they have asked these questions, so others may have the same questions. Some people believe sexual abuse is only when there was penetration and that is not true and some people believe it only “counts” if it’s done to underage people and again that is not true.

Sexual Grooming – The process used by people with a sexual interest in children to prepare a child for sexual abuse. This is where boundaries are blurred and eventually a boundary is violated, but first the abuser desensitizes the child victim to inappropriate behaviors and usually the first boundaries violated are not physical.

Sexual Abuse – Unwanted sexual activity.

Clergy Sexual Abuse – When a member of clergy (pastor/shepherd/leadership) uses his or her position and power to exploit, harm, and sexually abuse a member (child or adult) of their congregation.

**Attachments:**

Letter addressed to Steve Seboldt, Matt & Margo Walkoe in 2001.

Letter addressed to Gary & Marilyn Hargrave in 2003.

Letter addressed to TLW from MFT counselor in 2003.

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