

## **Sam's Testimony** At formal disciplinary council on Sept. 9, 2018

Dear President \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for calling this council. It has provided a once in a life time opportunity for each man who is seated around this table. Just by calling the council, regardless of the outcome, you have amped up the awareness of my cause to a new level. You have saved children's lives with the publicity this court has already produced.

The decision you make tonight will have ramifications that ripple into waves around the world. I have confidence that you, President \_\_\_\_\_, have the courage and wisdom to make the right decision. I know how difficult that can be. You will be risking a lot. I can testify that following Jesus Christ and doing what is right is a reward in and of itself.

Esteemed members of the council.

God has given you a unique opportunity. One that will likely never come again. This council will be like no other that you ever serve on. It will be historic. I encourage you to actively serve tonight. Speak up for what is in your heart. Stand up for what you know to be right. Be on the virtuous side of history.

I recognize that you don't have any vote in the outcome. You do have a voice. Use it to support President \_\_\_\_\_ in making the choice to put this stake on the right side of Mormon history.

242 years ago, 56 men signed the Declaration of Independence. They risked everything to stand up for freedom. They were vindicated and lived with the satisfaction of doing what was right but what was super hard. None of them had to live with the regret of having come down on the wrong side of history.

You face a similar decision today. The world is watching. The Church membership is watching. Not just Salt Lake City. In this room, the stage has been set.

Your decision will be seen for what it really is. Which is more important? Protecting the church leaders or protecting our children. The world sees how Mormons are treating their kids. They are disgusted by it. If you choose to excommunicate, the world will not only see what Mormons do to their own children, but they will also see how we treat those who speak up to protect our little ones.

That is the choice that this council comes down to: Protect the leaders or protect the children.

The Millennial Star, an early Church Publication, contains the following quote. Many have attributed it to Joseph Smith.

“We have heard men who hold the priesthood remark that they would do anything they were told to do by those who preside over them — even if they knew it was wrong. But such obedience as this is worse than folly to us. It is slavery in the extreme. The man who would thus willingly degrade himself should not claim a rank among intelligent beings until he turns from his folly. A man of God would despise this idea.”

Tonight, let's be men of God, let's claim our rank among intelligent beings, and throw off the bonds of extreme slavery.

What are we doing to our kids that is so wrong?

We have an institutionalized policy mandating bishops and their counselors to take minors behind closed doors all alone, and ask these children sexual questions. Every one of you in this room has been groomed to accept this as a normal thing. IT IS NOT NORMAL. It is not part of the restoration. It is not found in any scripture. Not the bible. Not the Book of Mormon. Not the Doctrine & Covenants.

No other institutional church or youth serving entity in the country does this. Everyone outside of the church recognizes that this is way beyond improper. It's dangerous, irresponsible and now borders on being illegal.

Last Tuesday, I received this message from a fellow Church member.

“I am taking my recertification training as a physician and one of our training is on mandated reporting of sexual abuse. It got me thinking. I called the sexual abuse reporting hotline.

I asked them, ‘If I was aware that there was a man taking kids behind closed doors and interrogating them about sex – would that be a reportable event?’

The answer: yes!

He goes on:

“In Massachusetts, if you were to call their child abuse hotline and tell them that a man was taking a kid in private and asking them probing sexual questions about their masturbation, pornography and sexual activities – they would start an investigation.

If you told them it was a catholic priest who was doing it – they would be even more interested in investigating it.

If you told them it was a Mormon Bishop who was doing it – they would say it makes no difference.”

What the church subjects our children to is abusive. When more parents start waking up to that fact – people are going to start reporting the local bishops for conducting these interviews and then state authorities will take action.

Many states have mandatory reporting for certain professionals, like teachers, doctors and law enforcement – but there are also 18 states in which every individual is a mandatory reporter. That means that if there is someone who knows and understands that these interview are abusive in one of these states – they are legally obligated to report that these men – these lay bishops – are engaged in these inappropriate and abusive acts and they will be investigated.

Many Mormon Bishops are professionals. Dentists, doctors or attorneys – and they are, themselves subject to professional licensing in order to practice. They are not only held to professional standards of ethical and accountable behavior within the confines of their offices – but if they are reported to engage in inappropriate and abusive acts with a child, they may be subject to investigation by their professional licensing boards.

These good men are being put at risk in their professions by the policies of the church continuing to require them to conduct interviews which are immoral, unethical and abusive.

The writing is on the wall. These practices will not be tolerated by a society that understands the harm and danger in allowing such things to be normalized and accepted. I have worked to educate and inform members and nonmembers alike of the clear and present danger posed by these interviews. And now that people are informed, they are not going to sit back and do nothing.

As said by early Church leaders, Let's our claim our rank among intelligent beings. Our bishops will soon be in the crosshairs of society's wisdom to prevent child sex abuse. Excommunicating me sends the message to Salt Lake City that our bishops' reputations are expendable.

29 questions

What are the dangerous and disgusting questions that are currently being asked by bishops?

I have collected thousands of testimonials from adults of what they were asked as children. From these testimonials, I have culled the questions that I'm about to put into your hands. I've heard some members say, "I've never been asked those questions." That's not the point. That's like dismissing a rape victim by saying, "I've never been raped."

I've heard some bishops say, "I've never asked those questions." Ok. Again, that is dismissing the rape victim with, "Well, I've never raped anybody."

Four of my daughters were asked questions from this list. This is what set me off on my path to protect our Mormon children. It was only last summer when my kids told me

about this. I was incensed to discover that my kids were abused all alone by these filthy, dirty, pornographic questions.

I have presented these questions to the highest levels of the church. I challenged the apostles to condemn even one of them. With their silence they have condoned every evil question that I'll now read. (Hand-out the question sheet)

Do you masturbate?

Do you know what a vagina is?

What were you thinking of while you masturbated?

Do you masturbate under or over the panties?

How many fingers do you use?

When was the last time you watched pornography?

What type of pornography do you watch?

Do you masturbate while you watch pornography?

Where and how did your boyfriend touch you?

Where your nipples hard?

Did you get wet?

Where were his fingers?

Where was your underwear?

What color were your panties?

Did you orgasm?

Did you know that once boys reach a certain level of arousal, they have no choice but to keep going, that they can no longer stop their sexual advances?

Have you ever put your penis in another boy's anus and if so, did you like it?

Describe the sexual positions you engaged?

Did you engage in oral sex?

Did she orgasm?

Was she shaved?

Did you ejaculate?

How many times did he ejaculate?

Where did he ejaculate?

Did you engage in anal sex?

Did the boy ejaculate in your mouth?

Did you put your mouth on her vagina, or use your fingers?

Did he touch your breasts?

Did you touch his penis?

How far did he penetrate you?

To a rape victim:

Did you like it?

What did you do to egg him on?

What were you wearing?

Did you orgasm?

Let's be men of God. Let's claim our rank among intelligent beings. Condemn every question on this list. Excommunication WILL send the message that you condone the hideously immoral practice of probing children with pornography like this. I want all the men in this room and the entire world to know that I CONDEMN this in the harshest and angriest tone I can muster. Tonight IS the time for you to follow Christ's example of angry indignation. Take the whip to the temple and overturn the tables of evil that have infiltrated our church.

Stories of Our Sacred Children

(Hand-out Books)

I'm gifting you something that I consider sacred. These are children's stories. Accounts of what we have done to our precious little ones. I applaud the courage that it took for

adults to relive their childhood trauma by putting it on paper. Most have suffered in silence for years and years. For the majority, their healing began with sharing their story, in a safe place of validation. Thousands upon thousands now rally around them in empathy and compassion.

As you know, I'm still a bishop according to church doctrine. Last month I was joined by 38 other ordained Mormon bishops in apologizing to the victims you hold in your hands. The apology was read by our friend, Bishop Bill Moore of the Sugar Land 1st ward, and broadcast to the world.

### Bishops' Apology

“As Bishops having been ordained by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with humility and boldness, we apologize to you, the thousands of children, now adults, who were harmed by bishop interviews.

We didn't understand how our words and actions could be dangerous and damaging. We know now. Some of you were groomed for tragic sexual abuse. We apologize. Some were sexually assaulted by their own bishops. How can we apologize for something so unconscionable? We are sorry.

We recognize that thousands were mercilessly and most often inadvertently shamed. Shamed into self-loathing as youth. Oh, how we apologize for that. Many were shamed into making very poor life choices. Some were shamed into taking their own lives. To the parents of those whose children died by suicide, we sincerely apologize from the deepest depths of our hearts.

Many of you have suffered for decades with open wounds from what happened to you behind closed doors. We are sorry and offer our sincere apology.

You are worthy. You were always worthy. We see you. We hear you. We give you voice. What happened to you was wrong. So wrong. Hand in hand with you, victims of our dreadful policy, we now march forward to protect the children and youth of today. Our sorrow is not expressed in words alone. Hopefully, you will recognize our contrition by our strong and continued actions.

We love you.”

### The Stories

#710 This happened about 2 months ago.

“My 17 year old daughter has been sexually active for a bit. Her mom and I knew about it and mostly talked about safe sex. Daughter felt she needed to repent, went to the bishop—who is a really decent guy—and he pulled out a sheet of paper and said “I've been instructed to ask you these questions. As far as I'm concerned, you don't have to

answer them.” He then asked a bunch of explicit questions: who, how often, what happened, details, etc.

“She did not come out uplifted. She felt shamed and shaken. He’s a good guy, she said, but once it went to the questions on the paper, it went downhill fast. She hasn’t attended church for the last few weeks. Thanks Mormon church. You just lost another good one with your abusive policies.”

Guilt is feeling like you have done something bad. Shame? That’s feeling like you are bad. Probing children about sex, all alone, by an untrained man, is heaping shame on our children.

Kip Eliason’s story. As a teenager he took his own life. Shamed over masturbation. Something all boys do and most can’t stop. He didn’t know that. He thought he was alone in his shame induced self-hatred. Reinforced by bishops who were clueless in their good intentions. Clueless about how deadly shame is. Kip is gone. Died by suicide

#169 Samuel Bresee. 4 years ago, at 14 years old. He died by suicide. The evidence he left behind told the story of shaming from bishops interviews. This boy came to dislike these meetings. His father highly encouraged him to continue meeting with the bishop. Today, this father regrets that he ever permitted his now lost son to meet all alone behind closed doors with an untrained man. He will live with that the rest of his life.

You brethren, also, will have to live with whatever decision is made tonight. Be men of God. Stand up for our children so that none are ever shamed into suicide again.

#120 Sandy’s story, not her real name. Many of you in this room know her family.

“When I was about to be baptized, at almost 8 years old, I had already been being molested for several years by another member of the congregation, who happened to be the bishop-at-the-time’s brother. In my baptismal interview, this bishop brought up the law of chastity, and asked if I knew what it meant. I didn’t, really. He asked me if I had ever let anyone touch me under my clothes where a bathing suit would cover. I don’t remember exactly what I said, I just remember the fear I felt in that moment when I realized that \*that\* is what the law of chastity was talking about. I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to be baptized, and so I wouldn’t be able to be with my family after I died.

“I remember feeling frozen, and being too afraid to talk anymore. He asked me to show him where, and how I had “let” someone touch me, by guiding his hands to do the same. I was too afraid, and ashamed. So instead, he had me sit on his lap, and he hugged me tight. He told me that he needed to determine how \*exactly\* I had sinned, in order for him to ask God to forgive me, so he told me that he was “feeling prompted” to demonstrate a few things, and I only had to nod “yes” or “no” to let him know if I had done them before, and he told me he was also going to ask me if the things he was going to do felt good, so that he could determine how fervently he needed to pray for me to be forgiven. In that “interview” he sat me on his bishop’s desk in front of him, and had me

lie back with my knees bent and legs open. He stimulated me with his fingers over, and then under my underwear, and then digitally penetrated me both vaginally and anally.”

#388 Groomed by bishop interviews that it was ok to go behind a closed door and talk about sex. That set her up to be sexually assaulted by a Sunday School teacher

#456 Bishop sexually assaults another 7 year old

#481 Sex abuse by bishop counselor

#582 Raped by the bishop

#586 Raped by the bishop

#719 1st counselor raping girls in the ward

#758 Bishop groomed and later sexually touched a youth

#779 Bishop had this boy masturbate in the bishop’s office

#783 Sexual abuse by the bishop

#785 Sexual assault by the bishop

#788 Two bishops molesting kids

#799 Sex in the bishop’s office with a 17 year old girl

#805 Sexual abuse by a seminary teacher. Groomed by bishop

The stories are gut-wrenching, tragic and so preventable.

Here are the consequences that are voiced over and over and over:

Childhood Self-loathing.

Self-loathing as an adult.

Normalizing children to sexual questions by adult men.

Sexual abuse.

Impaired sexual relations after marriage.

Years of recovery from childhood shaming. Often lasting decades

Suicide ideation.

Attempted suicide.

Suicide completion.

Last spring, 1,000 of us marched in Salt Lake City, from City Hall to the Church Office Building. We delivered similar books like the ones that you have in your hands. Our



hope was that they would land in the apostles' hands. President \_\_\_\_\_ confirmed that at least Elder Christofferson did receive the stories, read them and called them tragic.

But that was a private communication, through a third party, behind closed doors. Publicly the apostles have said nothing. These are the victims of a policy that the apostles mandate. These are their victims. Jesus plainly taught how we should act towards the wounded on the side of the road. In his gorgeous parable of the Good Samaritan, the priesthood holders were painted with a very bad light. In their haughty haste they turned their noses up at the sight of the bruised and broken. It was the despised Samaritan who crossed the road. He gently bound up the wounds. He put the thieves' victim on his own horse and led him to a healing path.

Tonight, my friends, you have an important choice. One outcome will put you on the side of the priests. The other will show you to be Samaritans. I'm referring to this night as the Samaritan's night. People are gathered in many locations around the country in vigils awaiting your decision. They are gathered as Samaritans, supporting those who have been so dreadfully harmed by what bishops have done. Sometimes the harm was overt and purposeful. Most times the bishop had no idea of the deep wounds he inflicted. By excommunicating me, many victims will feel re-traumatized.

I invite you my friends to join the Samaritans. Cross the road to the Samaritan side. Recognize & validate the survivors. Engage the covenant path. Mourn with those who mourn. Comfort those who need comfort. Minister to the least of these.

Regarding this issue, Jesus weighed in with powerful words. This is the only time that he threatened physical violence.

“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Stories of 802 millstones are in your hands. Stand up and be men of God. Risk doing what is right. My conscience is clear. I want yours to be clear, too. Whatever the outcome is tonight, you will have to live with it. History will vindicate or villainize. If the conclusion of this council is to facilitate harming our children, that decision will never be vindicated.

May this day be the day you chose to protect the little ones rather than protecting an institution.

This evening, I've delivered a witness to you. I am not alone. My sails are billowing with the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. He is my dear and powerful ally.

May he be yours, too.

Amen

## **Patty's Testimony (My wife)**

I'm really glad I have the opportunity to be here to discuss the situation at hand with Sam. I think my comments about his journey will address both issues that he is being held accountable for in this hearing.

Since we started dating 40 years ago, Sam has always reached out to the lonely, the shy, the widows, the needy, the overlooked, and the outcast.

As the stake single adult representative he would attend the events to make sure these marginalized members felt seen, heard and cared for. At dances he made sure that every girl was danced with and at firesides he made sure every person in attendance got a handshake and personal acknowledgment. Every assignment he has ever received he has always given 150% which is why he has been given many difficult callings such as high council member over stake activities and the older single adult program, stake young men's president when we took our youth to Salt Lake City, ward mission leader, when he had to go to the mat with the mission president for taking our missionaries away, Easter Cantata chair, and countless others. In each situation he went the extra mile, but his most challenging and rewarding calling from the Lord was as a Bishop in the Maplewood First Ward where there were numerous needs from a diverse group of members living within the boundaries. At least 30 children in the primary were being raised in single mother homes. These moms felt that the church leadership continued to focus on "ideal families". These women would come to Sam in tears feeling that they were second class citizens in the church, who were being forgotten. Instead of being praised for making the best of their situation, they were being told they would never be enough. He brought this issue to the attention of local leaders, who shut him down refusing to acknowledge the needs of these women. He then tried to reach the higher authorities who wouldn't accept his calls or return any communication from a Bishop concerned for his flock. Finally, after several failed attempts to reach anyone in the priesthood, he reached out to the General Relief Society President who expressed her concerns for single parents as well. She was grateful to Sam and told him to continue the good work of reassuring these women of their worth and value, but not to expect a swift change in current attitude. So that's just what he did, he spent time with them, listened to them, and even hired many of them to work for his business. Maplewood also had several members who were handicapped, confined to wheel chairs and could not use the bathrooms in the church building. This oversight kept these members from attending church. When Sam found out about this situation he immediately went to the person in charge of church buildings in our area to remedy the issue. He was told that Salt Lake refused to make the changes to install a handicapped bathroom at this time, so my husband took matters into his own hands and informed the authorities that he would be hiring a contractor and paying for the remodeling himself. The very next day, the building representative called and said that the changes would be made. To say the least Sam is a man of action

Several years later, he recognized another group of members in the church who were being alienated. People who had questions, doubts, or concerns about the church and no

safe place to discuss them. People who were dismissed by their leaders as unrighteous or unfaithful. People who were hurt and confused, who needed fellowship. After seeing the needs of these people, Sam began to have weekly “talkerías” where members could sit and discuss things they felt were not permitted within church walls. He always encouraged ward and stake leaders to attend these events, but none ever accepted his invitation. Sam was concerned that too many good people were leaving the church and was looking to church leaders to help find a solution. Instead they denied that this was a problem.

During this time, Sam joined several online communities of current and former members who posted about uncomfortable or harmful experiences with church leaders. He was very skeptical that these things could be happening in the church, but felt it was worth exploring. After finding out that his own daughters were asked sexually explicit questions in this very stake, he began his campaign to end this practice. First he went to his bishop who denied that these things were occurring and repeatedly insisted there was nothing that could or should be done, so Sam then went to the Stake President, who also decided this matter wasn’t worthy of further discussion or any kind of action. At this point, he was given no other choice but to reach out to the General Authorities, calling upon them to amend the handbook of instructions on how to interview our youth and children. To keep our children and our leaders safe, but as before when he was bishop, his pleas to help the needy fell on deaf ears.

But again, Sam is a man of action. So he took it into his own hands to bring attention to this problem, since conventional methods of reform were not working. He began voting opposed to the policy of interviewing minors alone about sexual matters, not voting opposed to the church leaders themselves, but to the decision to turn a blind eye to this harmful practice occurring in our church. and again our Stake Leaders didn’t try to really understand his no votes. There only concern was that he conform to church traditions of never voicing a concern. He began to promote his cause with the media in hopes to finally reach the ears of the apostles, who so far had refused to listen. His public criticism to make the LDS church a safer place for our youth does not make him an apostate, but rather a disciple of Christ who wants the best for the Lord’s church.

During the last few years that I’ve been going through this process with Sam, I’ve had a chance to sit back and observe. The one thing I’ve noticed is that this church has changed since I joined 48 years ago as a 15 year old girl. All the teachings I’ve learned as a member seem to be lost and forgotten in the “legalistic” rulings from the prophets. We talk less and less about the savior who is kind and loving and does not inquire about our worthiness because he already knows us to be worthy of His love and His atonement. Since they raised the bar over a decade ago, the church has become more oppressive and punitive with little room for joy and happiness. We are always being told to obey our church leaders or we won’t receive blessings. It’s almost become tyrannical versus edifying. The straight and narrow path is a road that allows for freedom and self agency to choose your passage, but the Church has shrunk that path down to a tightrope in which a small misstep leads to shame, embarrassment, and harsh judgment from the leaders.

Neil L. Andersen stated that “fear and faith cannot coexist in our hearts at the same time”, yet I see so much fear in the leaders and members of this church. Leaders are afraid to be criticized, afraid to make change, afraid to leave the safety of their small circle of brothers. The members are afraid to speak up, afraid to ask questions, afraid of being excommunicated. The apostles seem to treat their leadership position more as the executive of a corporation, than as the shepherd who knows each member of his flock by name. What does it really mean to be special witnesses of Jesus Christ

Luke 15:4 says “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, doth leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?” Sam has continually gone after those lost sheep, he has done so much good to help people who have been harmed by unrighteous dominion, who feel that any opinion other than the leaders is incorrect and sacrilegious. He has sat with them, talked with them, cried with them, prayed with them, and helped with their healing process when the Church wouldn't.

The Lord asks us to seek revelation. ALL are called upon, not just the Church leaders. All members of the Church, including Sam, should be free to express and bring forth their spiritual promptings without fear of repercussions. Oftentimes, my children have been my best counselors. They would bring something to my attention that may have been critical. This hurt my pride as a parent, but after honest contemplation, I realized they were right. Truth can come from the greatest of us, the smallest of us, and everyone in between. 1st Nephi 16:2-3 is one of our family favorites. Please take time to read it.

Today, Sam is being judged by a handbook, not by his heart, his righteous desires, or his good fruits. But on the final judgment day I am not worried about Sam standing before the Lord. Whatever decision you make today can and will be overruled by our Savior.

If you choose to excommunicate Sam today without having taken anytime to really understand the suffering of these victims nor have personally witnessed the amount of healing that has occurred since Sam has tried to prevent this from happening to others; I don't see how that judgment would be pleasing to the Lord. There is no denying that Sam is following the will and example of Jesus Christ. The prophet just asked us to call us by our true name—members of the church of Jesus Christ, so that we maintain that emphasis that it is Jesus Christ we follow—not an organization or a handbook. These things are subject to change at anytime. The Lord's command to mourn with those that mourn, comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to leave the 90 and 9 to seek after the lost sheep is enduring. It was there long before any handbook and will be there long after this policy is finally updated.

I plead with you today to remember the wise words, “Who am I to judge another, when I walk imperfectly?” As his wife, the one who knows his heart, his intentions, and the fruits of his labors better than anyone in this building, I can tell you with confidence, that this work has been a good one. And it is not the will of the Lord that Sam be stripped of his saving ordinances for seeking to serve the Lord and to follow the example of Jesus Christ.