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Church Provides Further Details about the Arizona Abuse Case

Church outlines its feelings on abuse and how a recent Associated Press story got it wrong



For generations, leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have spoken in the strongest of terms about the evils of abuse and the need to care for those who are victims or survivors of abuse. From the thundering rebuke of former President **Gordon B. Hinckley** to the recent words of healing offered by Elder **Patrick Kearon** of the Presidency of the Seventy, our feelings are clear. We echo those sentiments and teachings today. Our hearts are broken as we learn of any abuse. It cannot be tolerated. It cannot be excused. The Savior Jesus Christ wants us all to do better and be better.

It is important to us that our members and friends understand how deeply we feel about this subject. It is also important that they have accurate information about how we approach this matter.

Church leaders and members are instructed in the Church's "General Handbook" that their responsibilities related to abuse are as follows:

1. Assure that child sexual abuse is stopped;
2. Help victims receive care, including from professional counselors; and
3. Comply with whatever reporting is required by law.

Since the Church released its first statement about the Associated Press story, many have wondered about what was incorrect or mischaracterized in their reporting. The information and details below

are provided to help media, members and others understand how the Church approaches the topic of child abuse, particularly as it relates to this specific case.

What did the Associated Press story get wrong?

The AP story has significant flaws in its facts and timeline, which lead to erroneous conclusions.

We are puzzled as to why or how a media source as respected as the Associated Press would make such egregious errors in reporting and editing.

Each of the facts below is contained in public filings in the pending case and is taken from the sworn testimony of Leizza Adams, the mother of the victims. The Associated Press was directed to those filings prior to the publication of their first story, but they chose not to include any of them. Those filings, accessible to and shared with the Associated Press, are the source for the following facts:

- In late 2011, Paul Adams made a limited confession to his bishop about a single past incident of abuse of one child. The bishop then called the help line, where he was advised about how to fully comply with Arizona's reporting laws. In compliance with that counsel, from that time forward, the bishop repeatedly tried to intervene and encourage reporting, including by:
 - Counseling Paul Adams to repent and seek professional help;
 - Asking Paul Adams to report (he refused and also refused to give permission to the bishop to make the report);
 - Encouraging Paul Adams's wife, Leizza, to report (she refused and later served time in prison for her role);
 - Encouraging Paul Adams to move out of the

home (which he did temporarily);

- Urging Leizza to seek professional counseling for Paul and their children, which would trigger a mandatory report (they refused).
- In 2013, Adams was excommunicated for his behavior and lost his membership in the Church.
- Prior to and after his limited confession, Paul rarely attended Church or talked to leaders.
- It wasn't until 2017, nearly four years later, that Church leaders learned from media reports the extent of the abuse, that the abuse had continued and that it involved a second victim born after Paul's excommunication.

The AP story ignores this timeline and sequence of events and implies that all these facts were known by a bishop as early as 2011, a clearly erroneous conclusion.

The suggestion that the help line is used to “cover up” abuse is completely false.

- The Church's abuse help line has everything to do with protecting children and has nothing to do with cover-up. It has been in existence for more than a quarter of a century. Its purpose is to:
 1. Comply with the various laws of child abuse reporting in all 50 states and the provinces of Canada, ministering to the needs of victims and their families where we can, while reporting abuse consistent with the law.
 2. To encourage victims, family members and perpetrators to seek professional counseling and to report abuse to the authorities themselves.
 3. To directly report the abuse to authorities,

regardless of legal exemptions from reporting requirements, when it is known that a child is in imminent danger. The help line routinely reports cases of child abuse to authorities.

Outside experts who are aware of the Helpline have regularly praised it.

- Even when a report is not required or is even prohibited by law (because the confession is “owned” by the confessor), the help line encourages leaders to pursue ways to ensure these three goals are met.
- Those who serve on the help line are parents and grandparents themselves and include former government child abuse investigators and child abuse prosecutors. Some are even themselves survivors of abuse. The notion that there would be any incentive on their part to cover up child abuse is absurd.

Conclusion

We strive to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, who spoke powerfully and repeatedly about the **precious value of children** and **condemned those who would mistreat them**. These are the ideals that characterize our understanding and approach to the issue of child abuse. What happened to the Adams children in Arizona at the hands of their parents is sickening, heartbreaking and inexcusable.

The Church has issued a strong response because this is a topic where there can be no mincing of words, no hint of apathy, and no tolerance for any suggestion that we are neglectful or not doing enough on the issue of child abuse. It is a matter that strikes at our hearts and is so deeply offensive to everything that we value. We will not stand by while others mischaracterize or completely misrepresent the Church’s long-term efforts and commitment. Nor will we tolerate the Associated Press or any other media to make such gross errors on the details of such a

tragic and horrific incident as what occurred in Arizona. We are constantly striving to be better and do more, and we invite others to join us in such efforts.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

“Countless numbers of [children] cry out in fear and loneliness from the evil consequences of moral transgression, neglect, and abuse. I speak plainly, perhaps indelicately. But I know of no other way to make clear a matter about which I feel so strongly.

“...there is the terrible, inexcusable, and evil phenomenon of physical and sexual abuse.

It is unnecessary. It is unjustified. It is indefensible.

“...there is the terrible, vicious practice of sexual abuse. It is beyond understanding. It is an affront to the decency that ought to exist in every man and woman. It is a violation of that which is sacred and divine. It is destructive in the lives of children. It is reprehensible and worthy of the most severe condemnation.” (President Gordon B. Hinckley; [Save the Children](#), General Conference, October 1994)

Elder Patrick Kearon

“There is no place for any kind of abuse—physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal—in any home, any country, or any culture.

“The abuse was not, is not, and never will be your fault, no matter what the abuser or anyone else may have said to the contrary. When you have been a victim of cruelty, incest, or any other perversion, you are not the one who needs to repent; you are not responsible.

“You are not less worthy or less valuable or less loved as a human being, or as a daughter or son of God, because of what someone else has done to you.

God does not now see, nor has He ever seen, you as someone to be despised. Whatever has happened to you, He is not ashamed of you or disappointed in you. He loves you in a way you have yet to discover. And

you will discover it as you trust in His promises and as you learn to believe Him when He says you are “precious in [His] sight.” (Elder Patrick Kearon: [We Can be More than Conquerors](#). General Conference, April 2022)



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