



**Ann Hanson**  
**Minister for Sexuality Education & Justice**

# WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.  
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110  
Phone: 216.736.3700  
Fax: 216.736.3703

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**For the Sake of Our Children**

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As I watched and listened to the unfolding story of the Penn State scandal last week, my feelings of intense anger were focused on the accused pedophile and a system of power and privilege that apparently was engaged in protecting its honor and status at the expense of vulnerable boys who were cleverly groomed and seduced by one of their coaches.

One of the brief interviews I watched involved a young adult who said that he, too, had been involved with the Second Mile Foundation and had been with the accused pedophile, Jerry Sandusky. The young man went on to say that on a couple occasions, Mr. Sandusky had placed his hand on his thigh and caressed it. He knew then, as a child, that deep down this was not right and it gave him the “creeps” so he stayed away from the perpetrator and did not become another victim of even more horrible abuse. Did he tell anyone in authority about the creepiness of his experience? No.

This story prompted me to reflect on my own experience. When I was a 16, my driver’s training instructor (a young, charming, handsome and charismatic man) put his hand on my thigh during one of our classes. By some miracle, I knew on many levels this was very wrong. I shot him a look that made him know

that this was not right. He never bothered me again. Did I tell anyone in authority about the creepiness of my experience? No. Were others hurt because of my silence? Yes. I wonder what might have been different if my parents, my school, my church had taught a 5-year old me that my body was sacred and that if anyone touched me inappropriately, I was to tell?

Hopefully, this Penn State scandal will start a conversation all over the world – a conversation that involves the court system, institutions that care for children, our churches and schools, and yes, our own homes.

Every child, starting at a young age, needs to know that their body is precious and that no one has the right to touch any part of their bodies without permission. Parents and guardians are often uncomfortable with conversations that might involve sexuality; however, our silence allows our children, nieces, nephews and grandchildren to be vulnerable to a predator’s grooming process and abuse. We also need to tell children that they must trust their instincts and if someone makes them feel “yucky” or “creepy,” or if they are touched inappropriately, they have a safe place to come and talk about it.

The term ‘good touch/bad touch’ is oftentimes not helpful – a predator’s grooming process may consist of touch that feels good, especially if a child is in need of loving touch. ‘Stranger danger’ is another term that is misleading – most predators are known to the child. If your child attends a program (whether it be in church or the community,) make sure a ‘safe child’ policy is in place: no child is ever left alone with an adult.

Mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse varies from state to state. Teachers, social workers, clergy, physicians, etc., are not mandatory reporters in all 50 states. If you ever see or suspect child abuse of any kind, contact your local child protective services office or law enforcement agency so professionals can assess the situation. Do this for the Sake of Our Children.

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