

AN OLIVE LEAF

“MAY WE SHOULDER IT TOGETHER . . .”

By Sister Chieko N. Okazaki

With the recent passing of Sister Chieko Nishimura Okazaki, Mormonism lost one of its tireless fighters for addressing “real” issues facing Latter-day Saints today—ones for which there are no easy answers, and which sometimes reveal weaknesses in ways we as a Church handle things. Early in Sister Okazaki’s tenure as a counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, Sister Okazaki became alerted to the intense emotional, physical, and spiritual pain brought on by sexual abuse. In characteristic style, she addressed it head on, refusing to blink in the face of this agony but also refusing to forget the Savior’s promises to be with us always, no matter what. The following few paragraphs are excerpted from remarks given 23 October 2002 during an “Embracing Hope” conference at Brigham Young University. Access the full text at: <http://www.byub.org/talks/Talk.aspx?id=1136>.



WE ARE ALL HERE TOGETHER IN THIS CHURCH. We are all here together in this problem, and we must be all part of the solution. How is it possible to reveal trust that has been betrayed? When the fabric of our lives is ripped and wrenched, what will make it whole? Let me use the analogy of a piece of lace or a crocheted dolly or a cat’s cradle. All of them begin with a long, straight thread or string. It becomes complex and beautiful when it touches other parts and other strings, but all of them are fragile. They can be shredded, unraveled, and torn, but we need to remember that there is a pattern. Even if it is damaged, it can be rewoven. Second, each part supports the other parts and is connected to them. You cannot pick one string out without destroying the whole pattern. I am part of the pattern. The bishop who sits with the injured members of the ward while they face the injury and begin healing is part of that pattern. . . . You are part of this pattern, and the Savior is part of this pattern. I like to think of the Savior’s love as filling the spaces in the lace where there is no thread because there wouldn’t be a pattern if there weren’t spaces. I think of him as the intersections where the threads come together, making something spe-

cial happen where they touch and connect. We can be part of this network of service and support, and we can be part of the Savior’s pattern. . . .

[Let me quote from] material prepared with the support of the Brigham Young University’s Women’s Research Institute: “Victims need to be believed. They need to be listened to. They need to be relieved of any inappropriate guilt about their role in the abuse. Many women reported the strength they felt as their bishops and therapists worked together. This arrangement allows bishops to concentrate on the spiritual and physical welfare of their ward members while the trained professional works with the victim to resolve emotional issues.” One of the women was so anxious and frightened about going to her bishop that she

wouldn’t let him shut the door of his office during their first conversation. But when he heard her story, “he cried with me,” she said, “and that is when I started trusting him. He is the first man I ever remember trusting. I gave my therapist permission to talk with him to better understand how he could best help me.” And now another woman reported that her bishop was also initially baffled about how to help her, but he took the time to go out and get educated. He still keeps in touch with her even though she has moved to another state. . . .

FOR THOSE OF you who have been spared the scourge of abuse, I ask you to open the circles of your sisterhood and brotherhood. Include those whose trust has been betrayed by those who should have been their protectors. Open your hearts to them. Let them open their hearts to you. This is a burden that is grievous to be born. May we shoulder it together, not merely adjust it upon the backs of those who have born it so long alone. May we love each other with a pure unselfish active love as the Savior has loved us.

May our troubled hearts find the peace we seek with him, I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.