

Laurie Delgatto-Whitten Report

Statement as a former MMA Faculty

Submitted 7/10/2020

I served on the Music Ministry Alive team in 1999 and again in 2000. My role included giving presentations for the adult track participants focusing on comprehensive youth ministry, and effective pastoral care efforts with teens. I also offered presentations to the youth participants. I recall that Father Ray East and I led an evening of prayer in 1999, and Stephen Petrunak and I gave a presentation on leadership styles in 2000. As with all team members, I was expected to attend all sessions, and be present for every component of the program even if I had no responsibility.

I do not recall if it was in 1999 or 2000 that David planned an evening healing and reconciliation service. The service included scriptural readings, music, reflection time, and a call to share. This sharing took place in the form of a one-on-one with an adult team member. Team members were strategically placed in areas around the room, while participants were invited to approach one of us and share whatever difficulties or pains they were experiencing. Earlier in the day when David shared the format and components of the services with team members, many of us voiced concerns. Some felt unqualified to handle this type of responsibility, and others simply felt like it could be misconstrued as the sacrament of confession. David strongly disagreed and we proceeded with the service. I remember the awkwardness I felt during that service. I remember the awkwardness participants felt as well. Some kids barely knew adult team members, so we witnessed lines for kids to share with some adults, and others simply stood in place to never be approached. I also remember the heaviness we felt in that room. Simply put, this was incredibly uncomfortable for everyone, and yet there was an expectation that we all participate. The teen participants were never given the option to not share. Everyone was expected to come forward.

Later that night during a team debrief, David asked team members to share their one-on-one experiences. In essence, he wanted to know what each of us had heard from the participants. This of course was another concern for me, because the students were never told that their sharings would be made public. I refused to participate, although I don't recall if I made that known publicly or I simply did not speak up.

I also had concerns about the lack of adequate rest periods. The daily schedules were jammed packed with one event after the other. Students had no time to just be together casually, to rest, or to take some time simply on their own. The schedule also did not allow for a minimum eight hours of sleep at night.

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Students were housed in a nearby dorm, with boys on one floor and girls on another. There was only one adult chaperone assigned to the student dorms which housed 100-120 youth.

Team members were housed in a completely different building. There were no restrictions given to adult team members for being in dorms with youth participants and certainly one chaperone could not adequately provide the needed supervision for that many kids.

I also had concern about David's proximity to both the youth and adult participants. He seemed to have no sense of personal space, or appropriate interaction and touching with kids. I witnessed lots of hugs, back rubs, touching girls on the shoulder, hand holding, etc.. While no participant ever complained to be about this, I personally felt uncomfortable with his lack of physical boundaries.

David also struggled with emotional boundaries. Sharing stories that were certainly not appropriate for a ministry-based program. For example, in 2000, David gave the team a tour of St. Kate's. Passing by the dorm where he once lived, he proceeded to tell the entire team (including young adult interns) that was the location of his first orgasm.

I also had concerned that team members were provided with no safe environment training or even the basics on ministry to and with youth. I was the only trained youth ministry professional on the team. Other team members were either music ministers or music teachers, or nationally known composer. David seemed to be under the impression that anyone could work with youth, regardless of their lack of experience or ministerial knowledge.

After the 2000 event, I sat down and wrote David a letter to express all of my concerns about the program. As a trained youth minister, I felt that many of the practices he was implementing were not in the best interest of the young people attending MMA. My concerns included those listed above, as well as general concerns for the well-being of the youth. For example, in year one we had a young girl who was diagnosed with anorexia, who was refusing to eat all week. There was no one on the team qualified to address this situation, so we did the best we could. In my opinion there should have been either someone on the team with a clinical background or at a minimum, someone local should have been "on call" if we ran into issues above our pay grade. I also had concern about one-on-one lessons being offered to students in private rooms on campus. Overall, I felt that the program put its participants in emotional and physical jeopardy, and this concerned me.

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I honestly thought this was the result of just bad youth ministry practice and inexperience on David's part. I strongly suggested that David expand the number of youth ministry professionals on the team, and to consider providing at least some basic youth ministry training to other team members.

David did not receive my feedback well, in fact he was downright pissed off that I had challenged any aspect of his program. He argued with me via email and phone conversations for days. He was insistent that I was wrong all accounts. After a couple of weeks, it became clear to me that David had no interest or plans to make changes, and I then told him I would not be returning to MMA, because I did not feel comfortable with what I believed to be a lack of pastoral care and poor program practices. He was angry, and from then on told my former MMA colleagues that he did not invite me back because he did not think my presentations skills were up to par, rather than telling them the truth, that I had quit, because of my many concerns.

For many years following, I would receive phone calls from MMA interns and team members during the summer program weeks. Most they were call of frustration because of something David had done or said that they found to be inappropriate or unprofessional. This continued until all of the MMA team members I knew well, also chose to leave the program.

I have had little contact with David since. I would occasionally see him at a national or regional conference, doing my best to avoid him if at all possible. I just had no interest in a professional or personal relationship with someone who refused to put the best interest of young people at the forefront of his programming.