

July 8, 2004

To the Survivors, Board of Directors, Cameron House, Inc., Cameron House alumni, Presbyterian Church of Chinatown, the community of support around Presbyterian work in Chinatown, and the Presbytery of San Francisco

We have received with great sorrow the report of the Healing Task Force, established by the Cameron House Board of Directors to study, recommend, and bring healing to those who suffered the abuse, molestation, broken trust, and abuse of authority perpetrated by former Cameron House Executive Director, F.S. Dick Wichman. The Task Force has taken the difficult initial steps to bring light to a dark chapter in the life of Cameron House.

At baptism, the Church promises to guide and nurture God's children in both word and deed. Through the terrible abuse perpetrated by Dick Wichman, we have failed in this promise. We pray for God's mercy on the Church and ask the forgiveness of those who suffered.

The diligent work of the Healing Task Force, created at the impetus of Cameron House Executive Director Doreen Der-McLeod and Board President Greg Chan, and the courageous testimony of Cameron House alumni and survivors who spoke out about the abuse that they suffered, gives us hope that through love and prayer God's grace will strengthen all of us and prepare us for the journey towards healing.

We feel great sorrow particularly because it was the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America's Board of National Missions, a General Assembly agency, in cooperation with the Presbytery of San Francisco, that brought Wichman to Cameron House. We, as the successor in ministry to the Board, charged Wichman with "a ministry dedicated to the extension of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all its fullness and His service in all its implications." In return, we promised "...to do our utmost to sustain (him) in this ministry." Our letter of appointment recorded a mutual pledge to do this in service to God.

The Healing Task Force report, however, shows that despite our intentions, the fullness of all life was not acknowledged in the ministry of Wichman. The stories, repeated again and again, from many sources, clearly tell the story of Wichman's abuse at Cameron House. Repeatedly, trust was broken with participants in Cameron House programs, with Cameron House supporters,

and with the Presbyterian Church of Chinatown. Reading the stories now, we are overwhelmed with remorse for what happened to God's children, entrusted to Wichman's care. We express our humble apology for the abuse that continued there for many years.

Wichman took advantage of cultural norms that kept participants from speaking out about mistreatment they experienced. Only after he left the program, did word surface in public about his actions. We also regret that the Church has not moved more swiftly to uncover the truth. The report of the Healing Task Force rightly reminds us of one of the Historic Principles of Church Order: "There is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it."

So with this difficult letter, we embrace the truth of the allegations of abuse at Cameron House. We are grateful for the voices that have broken the bonds of silence that immobilized us in the past and we look forward to the day where all churches are safe places.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly Council is committed to beginning the slow and deliberate journey toward healing. Stories like those at Cameron House give the church strength and courage to work to prevent situations like this from ever happening again. We long for the day when justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:24). We will remain forever indebted to the courage of the survivors, Cameron House, its Board of Directors, alumni, and supporters for including us on that journey toward wholeness by bringing these stories to light, so that the healing can continue.

In Christ's love,

Vernon Carroll  
Chair  
General Assembly Council

John Detterick  
Executive Director  
General Assembly Council