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Fact Sheet for the Church Without A Name

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Also Known As: The Truth, The Friends, The Workers, The Two-by-Twos, The Fold, The Cooneyites, The Way, The No Name Church, Christian Convention Church, F&Ws, etc.

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Characteristics

Name: Claim to take no official name, but are often called: "The Truth, The No-Name Church, The Friends, The Way, The Two-by-Two's, The Cooneyites," etc. Officially registered with various governments under names of: Christian Conventions in USA; Assemblies of Christians in Canada; The Testimony of Jesus in England; The United Christian Conventions of Australia and New Zealand.

Clergy: Called: "workers, servants, handmaidens, evangelists." Shun formal religious training and education in original Bible languages. Lay members supply ministers' needs. Travel with assigned companions of the same sex, usually older in authority over the younger. Ascetic lifestyle.

Members: Called: "the friends, saints, children of God, brothers/sisters in Christ, the Kingdom, family of God."

Day of Worship: Sunday considered day of rest. Work ceases.

Bible: King James Version highly favored in English-speaking areas.

Hymnal: Use their own compilation: Hymns Old and New published by R. L. Allan & Son, England, 1987.

Services: Two principal types: (1) Sunday and midweek fellowship meetings: participation by members in prayers, testimonies and hymns. (2) Series of gospel meetings conducted by their evangelists for the purpose of teaching and converting non-members.

Ordinances: Observe Baptism by complete immersion; oppose infant baptism, sprinkling. Communion (bread and grape juice or wine in a common cup) served every Sunday, reserved for baptized members approved by ministers. **They do not observe the Ordinance of Foot Washing.**

Conversion: Public profession in a gospel meeting required to become a member. Previous baptisms are not recognized, and a convert must be baptized into this faith.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Taboos: Claim they have no rules or regulations. Some taboos or expectations vary according to locality. The following unwritten taboos are generally recognized by the entire group as being unacceptable: Televisions, movies, stereos, smoking, drinking, illegal drug use, swearing, gambling, dancing, reading Christian books or literature, Christian symbols, current fads and fashions, jewelry (except for wedding rings, pins and watches). No short hair, make-up, slacks or shorts for women. No long hair for men. Women are expected to dress very modestly and wear their long hair uncut and pinned up on their head.

Holidays: Usual holidays observed, including Halloween and Thanksgiving. Easter and Christmas are not celebrated religiously. Customs varied. Conventions: Held annually in most regions for four days, three meetings per day. Size ranges from 300 to 1200 attendees. Members are strongly urged to attend one complete convention per year. Convention property owned by approved members. Buildings are constructed with member donated funds.

Armed Forces: Approved method of serving in armed services is in Conscientious Objector capacity, refusing to bear arms, taking literally the commandment: "Thou shalt not kill."

Marriages: Strongly recommended that spouse be a group member. Performed by civil authorities, as their ministers are not licensed. Home weddings are common.

Remarriage: After spouse dies, remarriage to group member is acceptable. Restrictions on divorcees after remarriage vary depending on the overseer in charge.

GOVERNMENT

Organization: Contends the group is not an organization, religion or a denomination; non-incorporated, not tax-exempt. No headquarters.

Census: No census records of membership available. Member estimates range between 150,000 and 250,000 worldwide. In 1987-88, the USA and Canada listed a total of 1,071 workers: 63% women and 37% men. In 1991 they listed around 2,500 workers worldwide; 972 men and 1,533 women, making 1250 pairs, if all listed were able to be in the work.

Outreach: Worldwide, except where Christianity is not allowed to be preached.

Hierarchy: States, provinces or regions are controlled by a male head worker who assigns fields to workers under his authority. Each field contains various home churches, where up to 35 meet, over which an "elder" presides. All overseers and elders are men. There are less than ten senior USA overseers, to whom the state leaders report.

Controls: Characterized by rigid authoritarianism. Workers have absolute authority in all matters. Members have no representation and no means of recourse. Members exist for the belief system, rather than the belief system existing for the members. Unquestioning loyalty is expected.

Discipline: Implemented with talks, threats and shunning. Not unusual for communion or baptism to be withheld; or to take away offender's ability to take part in prayer and testimony. Meeting may be removed from an offender's home. Excommunication occurs rarely.

Finances: No collections taken. No accounting made to the congregation. Claim ministers do not use bank accounts. Monetary contributions are made privately to individual ministers, rather than collectively. Claim not to accept donations from non-members.

WHAT THEY BELIEVE

Doctrine: No doctrinal statement published. Profess their doctrine is the Bible.

Authority: State they believe and follow only "the teachings of the New Testament."

God: There is only one God. God is God, the Father, the Creator.

Jesus: View Jesus as God's only son, who is today under the authority and position of His Father; but He is not God the Son. Believe Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; lived a perfect life; came to establish a ministry pattern (Matt. 10) to be followed universally ever after; was crucified, died and rose again bodily before ascending to Heaven; look for His second coming. Views on this vary.

Holy Spirit: A force or power emanating from God or Jesus to a child of God; not generally viewed as God the Spirit.

Satan: A fallen angel engaged in an age-long struggle to deceive and seduce men to follow him rather than obey God. He is evil, a deceiver, a murderer, a liar, and has power only insofar as God allows.

Man: Created by God per Genesis account. Adolescents reach "the age of accountability," when they are responsible to God for their actions.

Ministry: Men and women follow Jesus' instructions to His disciples in Matt. 10:5-14, Mark 6, Luke 9. They leave their homes, give their possessions away and go from place to place preaching in pairs (two and two), unmarried, living with and taking meals from those willing to receive them. Don't ask for contributions, accept no salary, taking literally Jesus' command: "freely give as you have freely received" Matt. 10:8.

After Life: All people either receive eternal life in heaven or eternal punishment in hell, depending upon their allowance of God's work in their life while on earth.

Healing, Miracles, Speaking in Tongues, Casting out Demons: Viewed as divine signs used in the first century only to confirm and convince. Speaking in tongues is deemed to be speaking in foreign languages.

Church Sites: Congregation meets ONLY in homes for fellowship meetings, taking literally; "God dwells not in temples made with hands" Acts 7:48, 17:24. No restrictions placed on sites for their gospel meeting services. Strongly opposed to church buildings. A often used slogan indicates the emphasis placed their methods: "the ministers without a home, and the church in the home."

THE FOUNDER AND HISTORY

The sect is a little over 100 years old, and was started by William Irvine in Ireland around 1897-99. After Wm. Irvine was converted through Presbyterian evangelist, John McNeill, he undertook classes at John Anderson Bible College in Glasgow. He joined the Faith Mission as a preacher in 1895. Irvine and some others went on an experimental mission to Scotland in 1897, using Jesus' Matthew 10 instructions to the disciples as their guide; totally relying on God to meet their needs, without any prearranged financial support. Since this method worked (their needs were adequately met and several converts were added), they assumed that God had never withdrawn or changed these instructions.

Wm. Irvine left the Faith Mission and developed a separate faith ministry. George Walker, Jack Carroll, Ed Cooney and others joined him. They rapidly gained volunteers for their ministry who abandoned their homes and gave away their possessions. The first convention was held in Rathmolyon, Ireland, in 1903, after which the movement went worldwide with William Irvine, Irvine Weir and George Walker going to the United States.

Sometime around 1906, home churches were first established. Irvine believed he had been divinely appointed to bring the last message of Jesus to the world before the end of the age of grace in August, 1914. The other workers did not agree with what Wm Irvine considered a

progressive revelation. A schism arose in 1914, and the majority of the sect's adherents followed the leading of the other leading workers (sometimes referred to as the 2x2s, The Testimony, The Truth), while a few remained loyal to Wm Irvine (sometimes referred to as the Message People, the Witnesses, Irvinites). Ed Cooney, the co-founder was excommunicated in 1928, and some of his loyal followers also left with him (sometimes referred to as the "Cooneyites"). None of these three groups that were originally founded by Wm Irvine take an official name for their belief system.

Most members of this sect are totally unaware of the history and believe the group is the direct historical continuation of the New Testament ministry (i.e. of apostolic succession). However, the history is well-documented in the newspaper: The Impartial Reporter and Farmers Journal of Enniskillen, No. Ireland; The Secret Sect by Doug & Helen Parker; as well as other books; personal letters, credible eye witness' accounts; and court cases.

HOW THEY DIFFER FROM ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

In What They Believe...

That Their Fellowship:

is a direct historical continuation of the New Testament church

is "from the beginning"

is God's ONLY true way; therefore, all other church members, preachers, churches and religions are "false".

That Salvation: comes by grace AND works (self-effort)

is earned or merited through faithfulness and righteousness

is determined at death

is not possible without being in their fellowship

is conditional upon works and not secure

includes sanctification coming BEFORE justification

That Jesus: came to be a perfect example, pattern minister or way-shower

life is equal or more important than His death

created a way to Heaven through His death; and a way on earth by his life; which is one and the same as their fellowship.

That Their Ministers: are God's only true ministers

are the ones through whom one must go (mediators) to be saved

are the supreme authorities in Biblical interpretation

have authority and rule over members

viewpoints are considered as authoritative as the written Word

traditions are equal in importance with God's commands.

HOW THEY DIFFER FROM ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN BELIEFS In What They Do NOT Believe

in the Triune God
in the deity of Jesus; that Jesus is God the Son
in the deity of the Holy Spirit; God the Holy Spirit
the Holy Spirit permanently indwells every believer
in the finished work of Christ
that Jesus came to be our substitute in His life and death
that man is born in sin
in eternal security
in the priesthood of all believers
in speaking in tongues and do not perform healings
that conversion can take place through the written Word without human agency
that one can know they are saved in this lifetime
that salvation can be attained without going through their ministers
in total reliance upon Jesus' shed blood for salvation
that salvation is an unconditionally free gift of God
in salvation solely by grace through faith in Jesus, not of works (i.e. Jesus' Way is their fellowship)

DISCLAIMER: The above are general statements regarding the group's beliefs and practices gathered over many years from numerous sources. However, they may not be believed in totally. Historically, depending on the time in history and/or the overseer in charge, differences have occurred regionally and likely will continue to occur. And as in any group, some individuals may hold specific beliefs/understandings that differ from the main church body.

