

The following letter was sent to 43 Overseers

August 12, 2013

In January of this year we became aware of problems in the church regarding Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and the lack of appropriate spiritual and legal response to it. Learning of these things came as a great shock and disappointment to us, and we wrote to our overseer to ask how these things will be dealt with in the future. Since then, however, we have also learned of the related and wider problem of sexual immorality and abuse being tolerated in the ministry with offending workers continuing on in the work. Since we haven't received a direct reply to our first letter, since the scope of our concerns has widened, and since we realize that one overseer cannot answer for the whole church, we are sending this letter to senior workers all over the world and to friends and workers who know of our concerns. We will also ask that it be posted on the Wings for Truth website which seeks to expose CSA in the church and to support its victims.

Our concerns are the following:

- 1) accounts of CSA and sexual immorality and abuse among friends and workers that have not been dealt with appropriately spiritually and/or legally;
- 2) those in places of authority have not always understood the spiritual, moral, and legal implications of such behavior and have tolerated it in the ministry and in the church;
- 3) workers who committed such deeds have been allowed to remain in the ministry;
- 4) the secrecy and lack of transparency with which CSA and sexual immorality and abuse have been dealt; this makes our fellowship and the ministry in particular a safe haven for the immoral and abusers, protects the perpetrators, allows the sin and abuse to continue, silences the victims, and undermines efforts of those who wish to promote purity and righteousness;
- 5) offenders have often been moved to another area of the country or world where they were free to keep offending as nobody was suspecting of their past offences;
- 6) the church is not always notified of these offenses – there is often no public rebuke so that “all may fear” and there is no due warning on the danger somebody presents;
- 7) that concerned friends and workers have been punished for bringing reports of CSA and sexual immorality and abuse to overseers and for demanding righteous resolution;
- 8) sexual immorality and CSA have been excused as “sins of the flesh” as opposed to “sins of the spirit,” or sins that can happen to anyone without them meaning to commit them in their heart;
- 9) not all in place of authority understand that CSA offenders are not likely to be rehabilitated, that they will keep posing threat for the rest of their lives, and that they need to have restricted and supervised access to children;
- 10) not all in place of authority understand the effect of CSA on the victims – that they

face life-long trauma and need long-term therapy;

11) victims, whether of CSA or sexual harassment or abuse, have often not been taken seriously when they reported abuse to senior workers;

12) some parents of victimized children, adult victims, and concerned individuals have been discouraged from reporting allegations to authorities;

13) some workers still fail to see that CSA is a criminal activity which needs to be reported to authorities, or they think that the church is above the law and has the competence and authority to deal with criminal activities internally;

14) some senior workers have taken it on themselves to decide whether a CSA allegation is true or false, instead of encouraging the victim to report it to authorities and thus allowing trained officers to investigate;

15) some victims have been told to “forgive and forget” and to not talk about the abuse they have suffered, and even to “heal in silence”;

16) even when workers have been removed from the ministry for sexual immorality or abuse or CSA, or when friends have been found in sexual immorality or abuse or CSA, they have been allowed to remain in full fellowship without even a temporary removal of privileges that could lead them to acknowledge the seriousness of their sin and be brought to repentance;

17) cases of CSA have happened on convention grounds, and known CSA offenders are still allowed to attend conventions where they have access to children;

18) CSA offenders have been placed in meetings without members being notified of their offences so members can exercise due vigilance with their children;

19) the doctrine of “covering-up each other’s sin” being used as a justification to not expose evils in the fellowship, and thus allowing them to continue;

20) the practice to not interfere in another field which ultimately protects the immoral and abusers, and prevents those who would seek a righteous resolution.

We realize that CSA is a much more serious trespass than sexual immorality or even abuse perpetrated against adults, and that CSA devastates lives due to horrific consequences on victims. Though consensual sexual immorality should “not be once named” among God’s people – let alone in the ministry, it is not a criminal offence. There could be an argument that we should address CSA separately. Nevertheless, these are reasons why we find it hard to separate these issues: we feel that the all of these behaviors have been tolerated and have lacked appropriate response for the same reason; CSA has been mishandled and minimized under the label of sexual immorality; sometimes the age of the victim or consensual partner doesn’t allow for clear distinction between the two issues; the claim of consensuality can itself be subjective and problematic particularly given a difference in age or status; when a person is given to sexual immorality they are on a slippery slope to become sexually abusive, especially toward the age group which could be hard to categorize as either children or adults – teenagers and young adolescents; toleration of consensual sexual immorality gives implicit license and cover to perpetrators of CSA and abuse against adults, and compromises the ministry in its ability to cleanse itself. For these reasons, we have chosen to address both problems in the same letter.

To understand the full seriousness of allowing immoral and/or criminal behavior in the ministry, we must consider that homeless ministry is one of the marks of our fellowship. The fact that our ministers stay in our homes raises the level of urgency that moral integrity of ministers be

required. We have been shocked and disappointed to find out that we ourselves have been sent workers who are known to be child molesters or sexually immoral, and that we have been lead to extend hospitality to them as if they were true shepherds. We are saddened that in the fellowship where we share our homes and family lives with our ministers, we are left wondering whether a worker who may pose danger to our family's wellbeing will be sent to us. Even more so, we are left wondering whether those in authority are willing to risk harm to the sheep for the sake of protecting false shepherds.

Additionally, we do not understand the inconsistency of how sexual immorality has been dealt with in the fellowship at large. The sin of sexual immorality appears to fall into two different categories depending on who committed it: when a young woman is "caught in adultery" by way of physical signs of pregnancy, she receives public rebuke and punishment through not being allowed to take part in meeting; yet, when a man is "caught in adultery," there are no outward consequences. Even worse, when a worker has committed fornication, he is not only allowed to remain in full fellowship, but even allowed to remain in position of spiritual leadership and authority. If someone is carrying the evidence of their sin outwardly, they will be punished; but if there is no outward evidence, there is no punishment. And yet the sin is the same! And not even the same, for the sin of the one in the place of spiritual leadership is much graver compared to the sin of one who doesn't claim to be the Gospel bearer!

Most friends and workers realize the danger that sexual immorality and CSA present to individuals and to the church in general. Most workers realize that the Word they preach has to be accompanied by truth and purity in their lives, and that those who don't follow these guidelines are a stain on the ministry and a danger to the flock. However, we are left wondering how many there are who understand the seriousness of these things and who are in positions of senior authority. We are aware of some, but their sphere of influence and authority extends only to the limits of their assigned field. They cannot oversee what happens in all the corners of the church, nor do they have authority to do so. Consequently, there needs to be a uniform church-wide understanding of the seriousness of these offenses, as well as a firm and clear commitment to deal with them in such a way that promotes purity in the ministry and confidence in the ministry and the church.

Our church is a world-wide fellowship, and we are all connected through workers traveling to conventions and being sent to preach in different parts of the world. What happens on one continent affects those on another as well. When we lived in Europe, we had workers from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, as well as various European countries in our home. Here in the US, we have had workers from Asia and South America as well. Further, there is extensive travel among workers and friends to conventions in different countries and continents. Therefore, for us to have liberty in receiving workers whether we are in the US or in Europe, we need to have assurance of a world-wide church policy on how to deal with sexual immorality and CSA in the ministry and in the church.

We have attempted to explain why it is important to us personally to be assured of the purity of ministry world-wide. Yet, we realize there is a point of view that we should not concern ourselves with what is happening in another field, or even outside of our meeting. There also seems to be a rule against seeking help outside of one's field when those in authority are not

making righteous judgments. We have been informed of these rules as well-meaning friends and workers warned us not to concern ourselves with what is happening in the wider fellowship. These rules are very troubling, as in the examples known to us they have been used to cover up sin, protect offenders, and silence victims.

We recall the Old Testament example of the tribe of Dan when they refused to punish perpetrators of a heinous crime. The other tribes did not look the other way and say: "This doesn't concern us, it didn't happen in our area, and it didn't happen to someone in our family." They took the plight of the victim seriously as if it was a member of their own family, and they all rose up as one man and took action. They wanted to root out evil from Israel so that it wouldn't grow and spread. They did it for the victim and they did it for the whole congregation of Israel. Likewise Saul was moved to help Jabesh Gilead, even risking his own life for the cause. The plight of Jabesh Gilead wasn't only its own, but of the whole congregation of Israel. How can we not have the same feelings and concerns for our brethren?

We understand that all are subject to temptation and that all have fallen short. We ourselves fall into that category too. And we believe that when there is true repentance there can and should be true forgiveness and restoration to fellowship. True godly repentance comes from godly sorrow and involves fully admitting one's sin and taking full responsibility for the harm done. It can only take place in an atmosphere of truth, transparency, and accountability. "Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that ye may be healed." However, notwithstanding these hopes and desires for repentance and healing, we can never lower the bar of trust and responsibility imparted to the ministry touching the sanctity of the home and home life of God's people.

For the sake of our being able to have trust in the ministry, for the sake of our children's safety, and for the sake of being able to tell others about our fellowship freely, we need to have the following questions answered:

- 1) Can we have assurance that NO known child molester, regardless of how long ago or how far away he committed CSA, will be sent to our or anybody else's home under the cloak of ministry? Can we have assurance that NO known child molester is allowed to enter or remain in the work?
- 2) Can we have assurance that all senior workers will work to effect a change in the fellowship culture for the purpose of creating a safer environment for children? Considering the history of inappropriate handling of CSA allegations in the fellowship and the risk that workers staying in homes with children along with convention environment present, all workers and friends need to be informed that: CSA is a crime that has happened and can still happen in the fellowship, that protective measures need to be put in place, and that allegations and indications of CSA need to be taken seriously and reported to authorities. One part of this effort can be to give all members of the fellowship the link to CSA Code of Conduct created by concerned friends and found at <http://www.csainfo.info/> or <https://sites.google.com/site/csacodeofconduct/>
- 3) Can we have assurance that in cases of alleged CSA, parents of victims, adult

victims, and other concerned individuals will be encouraged to report allegations to authorities, and that workers will not try to judge whether an allegation is true or false, but will allow trained and authorized professionals to investigate?

4) Can we have assurance that if a known child molester is placed in a meeting, people in the meeting will be notified, so that they can exercise due vigilance with their children?

5) Can we have assurance that NO known child molester will be allowed to attend conventions? There is too much unacceptable risk involved in allowing known child molesters to attend conventions. Such persons can be accommodated by letting them listen to convention speakers by phone, as is done for those who cannot attend for health reasons.

6) Can we have assurance that NO ONE who committed sexual immorality or abuse against adults will be sent to our or anybody else's home under the cloak of ministry? Can we have assurance that NO ONE who has committed sexual immorality (regardless of whether it's consensual or abusive in nature) is allowed to remain in the work?

7) Can we have assurance that there will be ONE standard on how to deal with those who have committed sins of sexual immorality regardless of their place and position in the church, and regardless of the presence or lack of an outward evidence of their sin?

8) Can we have assurance that those who have abused the trust given to them because of their place in the ministry through sexual immorality and abuse will not be eased out of work in a secretive way, but will be openly rebuked before the church? This is especially important in order to provide transparency and accountability and to change the culture of secrecy around this issue, a culture of minimizing victims' accounts or blaming the victims, and of protecting fornicators and abusers. This would help break the silence of victims who fear they would not be believed and prevent their re-victimization.

We are aware that among friends and workers there is talk about "enemies of the way" as the ones causing trouble and shining light on wrongs within the fellowship. Let us remember Nehemiah, who when he learned of mistreatment of the poor and downtrodden said: "It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" Nehemiah's response wasn't to ignore the problem and blame enemies for the reproach, but to address and correct the problem in order to take away the reproach. When a mistake is corrected, "enemies" have no cause for reproach. Let us do the same.

We thank you for considering these concerns and questions. We are looking forward to receiving answers to our questions with hopeful expectation, and we are praying that you will take the necessary steps to make our fellowship a spiritually and naturally safer place for all. We are praying that willful pockets of darkness, duplicity, and deceit will be removed from our fellowship unto the edification and encouragement of all.

Yours in Christ,

A & M M.

Texas
