

Australia NZ Letter to the Church

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1 July 2023

Dear Australian and New Zealand Co-workers, Elders and Friends,

We remember you and appreciate you all, in your respective places, near and far. We are united in writing to you after a period of careful consideration. We have undertaken a process of meeting together, consultation with professionals, survivors, and brothers and sisters in our fellowship

.Cases of child sexual abuse and sexual misconduct among workers and friends within the fellowship overseas have been recently highlighted. These allegations are being managed in each jurisdiction with a number of people removed from the work and meeting attendance

We are sharing this information with you because, over the years, some of these people have been visitors at Australian and New Zealand conventions and special meetings. We are also aware of many family connections with friends and workers overseas and people travelling internationally. We have not been formally notified of individuals with child sexual abuse allegations against them who have visited Australia and New Zealand in the past, although we will do our best to provide up to date information to you if you request it individually from us. Australian and New Zealand defamation laws and victim privacy considerations restrict us from publicly naming individuals with allegations against them

.If there is anyone in Australia or New Zealand who has been affected by sexual abuse by anyone in our fellowship including workers, reporting to appropriate authorities is required by law and we are available to speak to any people with concerns.

We have been working individually in each Australian State and in New Zealand to address these issues locally but have now come together as a group of overseers to discuss how we work across both countries in a united way, to improve the prevention of child sexual abuse and support survivors who have been harmed within our fellowship. We all have zero tolerance for the harming of children, young people or anyone within our fellowship.

We know we have much work to do to listen to and support survivors of abuse and we are all committed to doing this. We will work together with the support of professionals and people with lived experience of abuse, to move to a standard policy and approach across all our areas. Our workers will continue to keep up to date with training on preventing child sexual abuse. In Australia, we will continue maintaining our Working with Children Checks and we will move to a similar approach in New Zealand. We will provide additional details for managing visiting workers and child safe guidelines for convention prior to conventions starting this year.

We will regularly update you as we progress. There is no place for people who have harmed children in our meetings and conventions; we ask any individual with a history of causing harm, or with allegations, or convictions not to attend. This includes public gospel meetings

We have a shared responsibility across our fellowship for the safety of our children and are grateful for each one caring for young ones. We encourage parents, grandparents and any who have regular contact with children to inform themselves about child sexual abuse. The two videos below may be helpful in this regard, and we encourage parents and guardians to educate their children about keeping safe and aware.

2

The Office of the Children's Guardian NSW has a 20-minute video on recognising abuse. <https://ocg.nsw.gov.au/resources/induction-video-part-1-recognising-abuse>

Ministry Safe provides online information for parents <https://Vimeo.com/577634014>
We draw your attention to specific legal requirements for certain groups of people to report any suspected child abuse and neglect to the authorities (known as mandatory reporters). This is in addition to anyone's responsibility to report any crime to the police. Mandatory reporters include the following:

- ACT – workers
- NSW – workers and elders
- NT – any person
- SA – workers and elders
- TAS – workers
- VIC – workers and elders
- WA – workers
- QLD – all adults
In New Zealand police officers and social workers only are mandatory reporters.
- <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/resource-sheets/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect>

We want to know and address any past or current concerns about misconduct or abuse of any kind, in our fellowship. We will listen to you, believe you, and will do all we can to support you. We support, encourage and stand by you to raise and report any issues. Criminal matters against children, by law, must be taken directly to the appropriate

authorities. We encourage accessing professional help and support, from professional bodies such as these

- Australia: Get support | National Office for Child Safety or 24/7 support on 1800 737 732
- New Zealand: <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/listing-information-support-resources-child-abuse-or-24/7> support on 0508 326 459
- Acknowledge that these matters have not always been appropriately addressed in the past. We are truly sorry for any harm and immeasurable long-term damage to victims, and it is our firm objective to do better in future
- .The care and safety of children in our fellowship is paramount and we are available to help and support survivors as much as possible

Warm regards and encouragement,

Malcolm Clapham, Graeme Dalton, Wayne Dean, Trevor Joll, Alan Mitchell and Alan Richardson.