

CSA SA Meeting in Bellefonte PA

Jul 11

Below is my (Otto Herr) summary of the meeting that occurred at the elder's home on Saturday July 8, 2023 in Bellefonte PA. All topics are summarized (not word verbatim unless in quotes) with the items that I deemed germane to the topic at hand. There was significant side conversation that occurred throughout the meeting. Also, I thought it is important to note that none of the workers took notes during the meeting. Note also, I had prepared a list of talking points and questions. We really didn't go through any of them, as we got hung up on the first one (a registry of potential/convicted offenders).

Meeting consisted of 4 workers and 9 of the congregation. Workers present: Ralph Miller, Dan Helenek, Ruth Veltri, and Margret Long.

Opened with a quick intro by the elder. Then transferred to Ralph to essentially lead the discussion.

When we asked if we could audio record the meeting, we were unable to get full group consensus, so we ended up not doing so. Note that objection came from a few of the congregation, and some from the workers as well on this topic. That said, I think that Ralph would have been fine with it, as we noted that this was for our use only (not to be made public).

I pushed for formal meeting minutes and was essentially told no to this (again, push back from a few in the congregation, and at least one worker - not Ralph).

Ralph gave a more in-depth intro on the problem at hand starting with the Dean Bruer incident and ending with noting that there was one worker on the "east coast". However, I felt like he downplayed (or he did not know how far reaching) because he only noted one worker on the "east coast" (not by name, but assumed to Leslie White) and noted that much of known issues were on the "west coast". So, I spoke up and listed the stats to provide a little more clarity as to how wide spread the issue really is ~500 perpetrators, 23 workers/elders removed, 3 conventions closed, and likely 1000s of victims).

Most didn't know this. And, for the record, none of the workers disputed those numbers.

Ralph noted that the plan moving forward was threefold;

1. Minsters are to continue to take "Ministry Safe" training.

2, Mandatory reporting within 24-hours of any suspected or reported sexual abuse.

3, Anyone who has been reported, is then not allowed to attend meetings or gatherings until allegations have been investigated by the authorities, and they are given the all-clear. Then they MAY be allowed to attend (case specific).

I asked if there was a centralized list of those who are not to attend due to allegations/convictions. Ralph noted that there is a public list of registered sex offenders. I acknowledged that list, however, I noted that would not include those who were just recently reported and told not to attend meetings. I asked how workers from other areas would know if an individual is to not attend? Ralph essentially said that he talks to people, and "word would get around". I presented the scenario where an individual was suspected of sexual abuse and Ralph reported it, then 2 weeks later, this individual traveled across the country to another state and attended a convention. I asked how those at that convention would know that this individual was not supposed to be attending? No real clear answer was given. I asked if a centralized list could be kept, that would be accessible to workers everywhere (essentially worldwide) so that workers from different areas could keep up to date. After discussion, it didn't really seem to me like they were getting this idea...or really knew of a way to implement it. I explained that this list may help to limit liability to those within the work, because then they could point to the list and note that an individual was reported. On this topic, it did not seem to go any further. It was also unclear as to whether or not this would be taken up the chain of command. We did not really get any further on this topic.

As indicated in my list of prepared questions (separate document), I noted that I thought that there would be more of a "plan" moving forward, and if not, I had some ideas on how things could be done if they were willing to listen to them (i.e. this meeting used to collect "questions & concerns" with a future meeting to address all). They didn't seem to know if that would even be possible.

It was noted by an individual that there were recent letters in Canada that described anticipated changes in the way conventions would proceed. The letter described changes in over-night sleeping accommodations, bathroom visits, etc. When asked if there would be any changes here in PA, Ralph stated that he didn't think so, and that things would proceed as they normally do.

Summary of other side-bar topics:

It was noted by some individuals in the meeting that more care should be taken on the part of parents to "educate" their kids as to "good touch, bad touch" type of things. This was acknowledged by the workers and everyone, but also noted that blame does not lie

on the victim, but rather the perpetrator. Also, this is not a policy that the workers can enforce as they are not the ones implementing it.

It was acknowledged that "reform" of perpetrators of sexual abuse (particularly those of CSA), rarely works, and that most will repeat offend.

It was also acknowledged that the number of "false cases" of accusations, are very rare. Both Ralph and I noted that statistically, they are less than 4% and they are nearly zero if it's a child that's reporting it.

I stated that I had prepared questions and talking points for the meeting. That I'd be willing to share them with them via email, but that I'd only do that if they promised to provide actual responses to them in writing. I didn't feel that I got a clear positive response on that and to date, I have NOT sent my list to them formally. However, I may in the near future.

After meeting discussions:

When discussing if there was "hierarchy" to the ministry, the sister worker that I was having a conversation with all but denied that there is "organization" or that they could be classified as an "organization" I felt, and noted directly with her, that she was parsing words with me, and there, most certainly, is organization and there is "hierarchy" to it. She did not agree. She stated that "some have more responsibilities", but there weren't "leaders" (other than god/Jesus).

Original Talking points/Notes/Comments/Questions for the Workers pertaining discovery of CSA/SA throughout the church group (globally) and allegations of cover-ups:

Would like to note the scope of the crisis: ~500 alleged perpetrators of sexual abuse within the church (taken from a few different sources). To date, here in North America, there have been at least 23 workers (or Ex-Workers)/Elders removed, and 3 conventions that have ceased. While the numbers of victims have not been tallied, it's been reported that those are within the thousands (world-wide). Keep in mind, statistics indicate that nearly 80% of sexual abuse is NOT reported, and the recidivism rate of those who are convicted is very high. Also, instances of false reporting are less than 4%.

1. We are advocating for open and clear written communication moving forward. Due to integrity issues and the image that leadership is inept, can we agree that this is truly the only path forward? If so, what's the plan? (Note that the only written and publicized

communication is worker lists).

Here are a few suggestions:

a. Please take note and record all the questions in this meeting all the meetings that are literally happening all of the States and Canada this week, compile the questions, and publish written responses to them. There are already a few websites that have been created, I can assemble that information and get it to Ray if he already isn't aware of it where this information can be published openly.

b. Then have a second meeting (say on a Wednesday night when all are normally gathered together anyway) at someone's home that is technologically literate and have a mass video conference call (say entire eastern seaboard - or by time zone) that addresses all the questions (summarized) and outlines a what the current policy is moving forward with those who have been convicted or have allegations of sexual abuse. Note that the Wings for Truth website has a written "code of conduct" related to CSA/SA. <https://wingsfortruth.info/2023/04/01/csa-code-of-conduct-2013/>

c. Provide some written open guidance on what the actual doctrine is. This is due to differences that are present in a global (and even regional setting here with the US). In addition to theology (things like trinity, celibate & itinerant ministry, etc), this should also include things like dress, adornment, technology (i.e. TVs, computers, etc), taking part in meeting if divorced, etc.

2. We have a question specifically for the sister workers here today. This is due to reports that are publicized on Wings for Truth site, and the lack of a credible rebuttal that refutes the treatment of the sisters, and our care for them. Question: were you told to not answer questions? If so, was there an explanation as to why?

3. Following up on the previous question, does anyone know if the meeting minutes indicated on the Wing for Truth website from the Milford NH Town Hall are accurate? Has anyone here reviewed them?

4. Do you have a complete list of how many people (workers/friends) there are with CSA/SA accusations?

5. What is the official stance on those who have been convicted or have accusations of SA as it relates to attending meetings/conventions/funerals/preps?

6. Other than police, who do we contact to notify that a person has accusations that can then be noted on the repository that's made public? We are advocating for a collective

database that is (or can be centralized). Do you agree with that approach, if not, why, and what's the plan?

7. How will individuals with CSA/SA accusations/convictions be prevented from attending meetings/conventions/preps?

8. Questions directly for Ray & Barry (if present):

a. Why did it take someone calling Ray to finally get Leslie White completely banned from meetings?

b. Is Peter Mousseau (NH) still allowed to attend meetings/conventions/preps? If not, when was he told that he was no longer allowed to attend?

c. Are there others we should know about?

9. Rochelle and I have both discussed this at length, and we honestly feel like we don't have a clear understanding. We have also noted to each other that we have not felt free to even ask this question (which we now wonder why that is). Can you please describe the hierarchy of the ministry. How does one become an overseer? Who is the overseer of the entire planet?

10. Similarly, can women sit in positions of overseers? If not, why?

11. Finally, questions related to money - its access, its distribution, and the amount. We feel this is important to ask in the context of CSA (and for other reasons open and clear communication and transparency).

a. How is money distributed within the work? Who has control of that money? How much of that money has been used for legal counsel?

b. If a worker is accused of sexual abuse, are legal fees paid from the donations of the friends?

c. Can some of that money be used to subsidize help for victims? We understand that has happened in the past (i.e. Jean Austin (Trotter) - but funds were cut off to her by Ray Hoffman in 2016)?