

# Friends Letter to Overseers and Church

Jul 11

The following letter is a collective cry from some of us who love the fellowship that we have enjoyed and are horrified and heartbroken over the recent revelations of years of Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Abuse within our fellowship and the handling of these situations. These revelations have highlighted a need for accountability and meaningful change within the structure of the ministry. We are aware that we have many honest and loving workers who seek to point us to Jesus and they are feeling overwhelmed and hurt by all of this as well. We seek only to encourage and support them and each other with a healthier fellowship and ministry.

This letter is written in two parts. The first part is addressed to three specific overseers pleading that they examine themselves and take responsibility for what has happened under their watch. The second part is written to the broader church with a suggestion for a path forward. It is our sincere desire that the path forward is led by God and is scripturally sound and thus it needs further thought, prayer and guidance by the church.

This letter was not written in haste, anger or bitterness but with serious and prayerful input from many people over the last couple of months as we have sought confirmation from the Holy Spirit.

If this letter reflects the cry of your heart, you can support it by adding your signature. The letter will be open for signatures until July 17, 2023.

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To Ray Hoffman, Barry Barkley, and Dale Shultz:

We are writing this in good faith and out of great concern for the state of our fellowship and ministry. We have enjoyed many years of fellowship and we have a love for one another and for our ministers who love and point us to Jesus. Most importantly we have a love for God, and a sincere desire to know Him better through His son. We feel profound hurt, disappointment, and righteous anger as revelations of abuse, coverup, and mistreatment continue to come to light. We are sorrowful over those who have felt they must leave the fellowship because of these things. While CSA/5A is horrific and the most pressing issue that needs to be resolved, these

past days have revealed there are many other things in our fellowship and ministry that are not Christlike, including:

- CSA / SA being allowed to proliferate even when obvious to overseers, workers and others
- Decisions that are not aligned with the Spirit of Christ
- Dysfunction in the ministry causing mental health problems and burnout
- Abuse of power and authority
- Unwillingness to believe and work with victims or advocates of victims

The continued lack of a spirit of deep humility and repentance by you specifically is distressing. The apostle John asks us to try the spirits, and when we do that, we find ourselves asking - where is the Christlike response? Where is the asking "what can we do to help?" Where is the compassion? Where is the sackcloth and ashes? How can the church be expected to believe you didn't have knowledge of so many of these crimes and moral shortcomings, when over and over people have spoken and indicated your awareness, and even mistreatment of them for bringing the accusations forward?

Three specific examples involve Ira Hobbs, Leslie White and Robert Corfield. We continue to read honest and heartfelt accounts by those who testify that you had knowledge of abuses by these men, as well as others, over the course of years. Indeed, there are numerous accounts of weaponizing our faith and using fear to silence and shame people for bringing legitimate CSA/SA and other concerns forward. In some cases, people have been removed from meetings because they dared to speak up about the abuse and wrong in the ministry. These situations are examples of a failure of leadership and do not reflect a Spirit led ministry.

There are two accounts in the Bible that come to mind of appropriate responses to shortcomings. The first is in 2 Sam 12 when Nathan came to David after he had sinned. Nathan said to David "Thou art the man." David, the King in the highest place of authority, immediately said "I have sinned against the Lord." When he learned what the consequences of his decision would be, the loss of a little one, he fasted and laid in sackcloth - a sign of real humility and sorrow.

The other account is that of Jonah when he came to Nineveh and told them of their sin and imminent destruction. The people of the city and even the king himself put on sackcloth and sat in ashes out of sorrow and repentance.

The church is saying to you: "Thou art the man". The church is playing the part of Jonah. We are now months into these heartbreaking accounts being shared - where is the true sorrow? Where is the turning and repenting? Where is the Spirit led response? The actions to right these wrongs? There should be tears streaming down your cheeks out of compassion for all those who have been wronged and out of a deep repentance for your decisions. The apologies and actions of removing CSA offenders recently have come only after great pressure and exposure. While the decisions you were making were perhaps well-meaning at the time, the results have been undeniably poor. The fact that so many in our fellowship are hurting and crying out is evidence of these results.

You are the leaders of our ministry. In any organization, the culture and the tone are set by those in authority. It was as true in the time of the Kings in the Bible as it is now. It has become overwhelmingly clear that within our fellowship there are systemic problems that have resulted from decisions that are not scripturally sound or Spirit led. There has been a profound loss of trust and confidence in the leadership of our ministry. We cannot reasonably expect that the same men that led us into this situation can be the same men to lead us out. If what was happening in our fellowship was happening in any other group, there would be no choice but for leadership to step down for the good of the organization. Further, in the workplace, those committing or covering up serious crimes like these would be immediately fired. Heaven rejoices when even one lost sheep is found - are you willing to step down if it means the faith of even one soul is preserved?

Ray, Barry and Dale -the healing of the church cannot begin until there are real, meaningful changes in leadership. Wouldn't it be better if the decision to step down came from a place of true humility and realization, rather than due to the call of others? To humbly take accountability and responsibility for past wrongs, as the highest authorities in our church? We truly hope you can examine yourselves, let the spirit of Jesus reign in your hearts, and humbly take the lower place.

### **To the church for consideration: a possible solution**

The revelations of the past few months have highlighted a structure that lacks transparency and accountability. We believe our fellowship is precious and we desire it to continue in a healthy, Godly way. As an alternative to address the shortcomings of the current hierarchy and authority, one possible solution could be:

1. Those currently in the highest authority (Barry, Ray, and Dale specifically) humbly accept accountability and step down from leadership for the good of the church so that healing can begin; other leaders responsible for similar actions should step down as well
  
2. A council of workers and elders is formed in each region where worker staff is shared. An example of this may be found in Acts 15:22 - "Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers."
  - Council should consist of elders, wives and workers, including sister workers
  
  - Council members should serve single staggered 3 or 4 year rotational terms
  
  - Responsibilities of the council should include:
    - Appointment of head worker; removal of head worker if necessary
  
    - Oversight of independent investigations in cases of abuse or accusations of serious wrongdoing, Generally, issues should follow the scriptural intent in Matt 18 of taking the concern to the individual, then be addressed with a witness, and finally taken to the council/church. In cases of criminal abuse, authorities should be notified and handle the investigation.
  
    - Creation, maintenance, and communication of policies around CSA/SA and codes of worker conduct
  
    - Consultation on issues of doctrine, structure, finances and worker moves

Item # 2 above is only a suggested framework. The role of such councils would need to be further developed by ministers and elders based on their collective understanding of the scriptures and the needs of the church and ministry. Within the body there are many different gifts our friends and workers possess and utilizing their talents along with prayerful, thoughtful consideration, we are confident we can find a

better path forward. We are all aware that doing nothing is effectively doing something and it has become abundantly clear the current structure is not healthy and has led to disastrous results for many. Thus, we plead that we would all humbly look to Jesus to be our guide and begin to take Christlike steps forward.

Signed by elders, friends, and former workers who love our fellowship

*[Signed by 95 names at the time WINGS posted this report]*

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The letter is available to be signed  
at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfArTnmjoB6sv5gaFkqtGE9Vv4hBG16kOLli1rTGCINUZquVg/viewform>