

Friends and workers meeting in Georgia re CSA and SA

CSA AND SA meeting Tuesday May 23rd 7pm - Held in Georgia

Workers Present: Kelvin Naef (Overseer), Audrey Fuller, Carl Nelson, Sharon Wahlin

Meeting was opened with prayer and then the first question was asked: Are there currently any friends or workers in GA that have allegations of CSA or SA against them, past or present? 4 GA workers present said they aren't aware of any current allegations.

A friend asked what the process is for ensuring that workers who come to Georgia don't have a history of CSA/SA because it's been the process in the past to move accused workers on to other states. Carl Nelson stated that he's not aware of any current policy in the US or Canada and that things haven't always been handled the right thing in the past. Ministry Safe is being implemented nation-wide.

A friend asked for the procedure on how something reported is handled. Carl said that the workers are mandatory reporters, that most workers did not know this because they don't have professional training, but 15 years ago a worker found out the hard way that the workers are all mandatory reporters. That is now their policy, to report to the authorities when there's an allegation. Kelvin Naef said that when it involves children, it's really out of the workers' hands.

A friend clarified that 20+ years ago, friends took allegations to the workers according to scripture, but laws have changed and what he's now hearing is that friends need to take allegations directly to the law, not elders or senior workers. A friend knowledgeable in the laws of this told everyone that Child Protective Services is who should be notified when the allegations involve a child. Carl said that the GA workers have information they're going to send to all of the friends giving information about legal steps to take regarding CSA and SA. The forms they have are from the recent Texas seminar but they've modified it for the laws of GA/SC/FL.

A friend encouraged all friends who haven't already to take the Ministry Safe course. It's open to everyone, costs \$10 and takes about an hour to complete. Another friend said that there's information on the course for parents.

Kelvin let everyone know that about 15 years ago some of these issues arose in other states and at that time several brothers met with professionals to get advice on how to

handle them. After that the brothers had sessions with every staff in the midwest and eastern states. That was when they were all asked to take the Ministry Safe course and most have taken it multiple times. These are things that they have been educated about for 15 years now and many friends are not aware of that.

A friend asked if all workers nationwide have taken the course. Kelvin said that he believes now that all have taken it. Unfortunately it wasn't done everywhere prior to recent events, but it was done in all eastern and midwestern states.

A friend asked if the workers notify the friends when there's an allegation or a conviction. Carl said that there's a risk in an innocent person's life being destroyed, but that there has to be some transparency too, so the practice is to notify when there's an allegation. Audrey Fuller agreed, stating that many times perpetrators are never convicted. A friend asked what a "credible allegation" meant. Carl asked "Where do you draw the line?" Another friend stated that "You don't draw the line. If a child has the courage to come forward and say anything, you give them the benefit of the doubt and you report. There is no gray area here."

Another friend asked how situations that aren't criminal but just inappropriate for those in the work are handled, including those involving two consensual individuals in the work. Stated thankfulness for workers willing to give up marriage and families, but asked if workers who have allowed themselves into temptation are asked to step down if they don't decide to do that themselves. It shouldn't be seen as a negative thing for a worker to make the decision that they want to leave the work for love, but also not a good thing for the ministry for them to stay in the work.

Another friend brought up the business setting: In a business setting, if a leader has allegations of even a consensual relationship with an employee, the board of directors would immediately call an investigation and if found to be true, he/she would be immediately terminated. Rumors of Robert Flippo's relationships circulated a long time ago. There is zero possibility that no workers knew about this then if multiple friends knew. In regular life, there are certain standards that leaders are held to. Those leaders don't go into people's houses. The workers go into people's houses so there should be standards and processes.

Audrey Fuller said that she thinks a pattern of behavior is really important. David made a bad mistake with Bathsheba and there were consequences but it was once. It was not five or six times. When there's a pattern of behavior, obviously it's something we have to address.

A friend said that we need to know about things that happen in the entire country or world, not just in our state. This is a global family. We don't expect perfection, we just need information.

Another friend said that overseers asking not to share information with others or not addressing things because they happened in other states is unrealistic. People are sharing on social media but we shouldn't hear about these things there, we should hear them from the workers.

Audrey also stated that the power difference in a relationship involving at least one worker is a huge consideration.

A friend said that in Iowa, it is criminal for clergy to have a physical relationship with a member of their congregation. But there's also a moral side, not just legal.

Another friend said there's common sense about what's right and wrong and reiterated that transparency is important. The doubt needs to be dispelled, otherwise people are being left to interpret the information.

Another friend said that we don't want to lose friends over a lack of information. The workers work so hard at bringing people into the fold, but what about the ones who are here?

Audrey said that one of the moderators of Wings told her 7 years ago that over 200 people had left the fellowship over Ira Hobbs and that broke her heart. The workers knew about all of the allegations. A friend said that as a child she heard the allegations, and her parents dismissed it. Carl said that when that came out, a letter was sent to Texas friends and there was nothing swept under the rug. He said that they try to handle things on a case by case basis and try to be led by the spirit about when and how to release information, aside from the legal side of things. He said they love and live among the friends and become aware of things throughout the kingdom but it's not in their nature to expose failings.

A friend asked if other states were notified about Ira Hobbs, but Carl said he wasn't here at the time. Another friend said that there are many friends concerned about these things and that it would give us all a lot more peace to know these things. Maybe the workers feel that sharing these things would cause issues, but not saying things creates bigger problems. There are a lot of the friends talking to each other about these things, and if the workers are trying to keep things silent, that's not happening.

Kelvin replied that they haven't been silencing people, but have been going on special meetings visits the last few weeks and talking about these things daily.

A friend said that one of the issues is that there isn't unity among the overseers; things are done by borders or states and not across the fellowship. Those borders need to be wiped out as information travels so fast. These are one kingdom issues. Covid was a perfect example, in that there wasn't unity in how things were handled. All of us here want to see change. Will the status quo just continue because the status quo is not safe. Asked again for a process for dealing with these things to be created.

Carl said they like to respond to the flock as the need appears, and to not write policies for the kingdom but to have a spirit-led ministry. Said there won't be one policy that works for the whole ministry. A friend asked what we do if someone like Dean Bruer is the one deciding these things, obviously not spirit-led. Carl said that in Bible days there were people in authority making bad decisions and the Lord removed them. A friend said that we hear that, but it is time for the senior workers to get together and have these discussions. Individuals making these decisions is not healthy as there are often senior workers not making spirit-led decisions. The friends often treat the workers as if they're mini-Gods and that is wrong.

Another friend spoke that there has been some minimizing of sexual assault, not involving children. There is a question of consent, and when there is a difference of any kind of power, there is no consent. There needs to be a standard, just because of the nature of abuse. It is so different from the perspective of a woman-what men may think is consensual is often not. Kelvin asked all to think about King David, who was in a position of high power and committed adultery and murder but the Lord did not remove him from being king. Audrey said that the Lord didn't remove him from being king, but he was not going into people's homes.

A friend said he's recently worked with a neuroethicist to determine in the workplace how to maintain ethics in the conversations between caregivers and patients. She said that there's a standard of law that's above the written law. Those things will usually eventually become written law, but they usually exist because there's an imbalance of power. Friend said he thinks the ministry would have a standard above the universal laws of the workplace.

Ministry Safe was implemented in the midwest and the east. Current events that started these conversations happened in the west. This put the workers in the east in an awkward place. There has been a lack of harmony between the east and west coasts for at least 75 years or more. We need to pray for our leaders. This problem is at the top. Said he thinks the Lord is cleaning up some things before he brings the two coasts together. We need to be patient with the Lord but pray really hard that those leaders are childlike and praying and not considering themselves in the situation. This division is not just in the United

States but around the world. We love that we're not an institution, but it's difficult to create uniformity without becoming an institution.

Another friend said that outside pressure might lead to us needing to become an institution, paying taxes etc. This change is good. Previous generations would never have asked for a meeting like this. Another friend said she's encouraged that everyone at this meeting cared enough about the family of God to want to make it safe and to have unity.

A friend asked a question that's been on his heart for a while: "For over 120 years now, we have been indoctrinated to accept that our fellowship is the only right way, the perfect way, so now it has become clear that in order to preserve that doctrine, secrecy and coverups have been the standard mode of operation at every level. Do the workers plan to continue teaching that doctrine?" Said when his son was 7 years old, on the way home from convention, he asked his dad "Do all of the other preachers in the world know that they're going to hell? Said this is so unfair to our children, mental abuse even. This seems to be the spirit of our group, and in order to preserve the doctrine of the "perfect way," we have to have secrecy and coverups.

Carl said he speaks in gospel meetings that Christ is the only way, not we are the only way. But there will be unity among the brethren. The spirit separates the Lord's people. In Acts 15, there was disunity but it took time to work those things out. The spirit was leading in those matters even though there were some different opinions about the right forward. Kelvin said he's been in all of the western states, where he found good fellowship and his own personal experience tells him that we have a lot more in common than we have differences.

A friend said he's also experienced unity, but there are also things that need to be addressed collectively (divorce and remarriage, etc). This will bring people together. Salvation belongs to God, and the scripture says that God's desire is that all should be saved. Thankfully it is God, because if some human was making that decision, we would have a massive mess on our hands. Several offered their own experiences on this topic.

Rob, A worker who flew in from Italy this same day, gave an outside perspective about grapes vines in Italy. If the branches abide in the vine in every part of that country, there is fruit. Our responsibility is to God, and that is what keeps us together. Original questioner of the "one way doctrine" gave the opinion that William Irvine and George Walker established a system of fellowship. Several workers gave Biblical references that backed up the meeting in the home as how God wants us to serve. Different opinions expressed but several in the room.

A friend moved the conversation back to CSA/SA and brought up liability of workers and convention ground owners of not handling matters appropriately. A council needs to be created to come to standard about these matters: including sister workers and elders.

Another friend asked why if God is in control, has this all been allowed to happen to victims, especially little children. Said he grew up in a country where he was mentally and emotionally abused by the workers so he feels very strongly about this. More discussion about the way being Jesus, not a manner of worship. Agreement to be careful to not follow humans, but Jesus. A friend said we're the ones who have to make the change, that moving forward we can focus on whom we believe in, not what we believe in.

Another friend talked about the language we use being important, especially with our children, so that moving forward we're more focused on Jesus and less than on the people. Another friend asked that workers touch on being compassionate and listening to and validating people (women) who come forward with allegations of abuse. The victims have suffered double than what they should have. Love is our banner, but we haven't shown that love towards victims in the past.

Another friend said that Paul made it clear that man wasn't above woman or vice versa. A topic for another day on the balance of power among men and women in the work. A friend got emotional asking for concern for safety for women and children in the fellowship moving forward. Asked for open dialogue moving forward.

Another friend said it's not enough to tell people to be patient. There have to be steps forward to make people feel comfortable. We need to continue to have these types of discussions. People are desperate to talk about things. Kelvin said they've been visiting individually with friends for weeks over the special meeting rounds and are very happy to discuss these things within homes. A friend said that in Ezekiel 34, God instructs shepherds on how to care for the sheep. Kelvin said they do have a feeling of love and care for the friends. Said they're not perfect, but want to do the best they can. He wanted to let the friends know that the staff did have a recent informal session together, reviewing what is appropriate and inappropriate in the work. Said they're trying to educate the staff but can't force or control people.

Carl said this education information will be going out to all homes in the three states. They will also strongly suggest that elders take the ministry safe course. A friend said that even sharing that the workers have been discussing these things with the entire congregation would really help people to feel peace. Sending letters out on a periodic basis would quell a lot of concerns.

Kelvin said he can only think of four meetings in 48 years in the work where a staff has discussed organizational matters. A friend suggested that they have far more to make decisions as a staff.

Another friend said we're all here because we care. It's all about having more transparency and more communication on the evidence of change. Another said not to fear to communicate. Children can handle anything except being lied to, even a lie of omission, even if honorable. Same with us. We can handle things and we'll have more peace knowing them, especially about CSA or SA.

Meeting wrapped up with light-hearted jok