

Worker Correspondence with Concerned Friends

Jul 9

Introduction by the group "Connected and Concerned Friends"

A week ago, we received the attached letter from a worker who viewed the Connected and Concerned Friend's forum. The writer's intention was to post it publicly, but we have chosen to protect their identity.

While this letter is written by one individual, we believe it represents the views of enough people in the ministry to warrant a response. We appreciate that this letter gives us another opportunity to explain the purpose of this community. This forum was created to keep individuals informed, connected, and working toward positive change within the fellowship, specifically in response to the crisis of child and adult sexual abuse. In all of this, the goal is to uphold Jesus and support the healthy examination of traditions. Our effort isn't about making Jesus less, it's about making Him everything, as in Him there is no abuse, deceit, or harm.

Genuine faith in Jesus is not fragile and will stand up to questions, discomfort, and introspection. We believe that our fellowship will be strengthened (not weakened) by healthy examination, transparent communication, acknowledgment of wrong, and by advocating for meaningful policies and the lawful response to crimes.

We have attached the original letter (name redacted) and have also included our response to that letter directly below this introduction. Our team wants to acknowledge and thank the many workers and friends who are showing compassion, wisdom, and courage in our current crisis. As always, we appreciate your respectful comments and thank you for continuing to adhere to our Code of Conduct.

From the Connected and Concerned Friends Hosts

CONNECTED AND CONCERNED FRIENDS RESPONSE TO LETTER

Prior to our point by point response below, one of our hosts wrote this after reading this worker's letter to us, and we wish to include this in our opening:

Friends,

I recently returned from a camping trip to the North Shore of Minnesota. As my husband and I pulled into our camping spot for the night, I received the aforementioned letter. I read it quickly before setting up camp and tried pushing the thoughts of it away so I was able to focus on my family. But that night as I pondered the letter and stared into the flames of our campfire, I was wondering how Moses knew that the bush was burning but not being consumed. It's easy enough to see that a bush is on fire, but possibly harder to realize that it isn't burning away. When I was watching those logs, it was pretty obvious that the only way he knew they weren't burning up, is if he stopped and studied their unwithering leaves with curiosity. Only then did God speak to Moses out of the bush and show him the plan for saving Israel out of Egypt.

Why do I mention this? Because for the last several months there have been many in our fellowship who have viewed our current situation with panic. Friends and workers alike have tried with all of their might to put out the fire and return everything to "normal". The woeful part of this response is that they are not beholding the church with wonder and seeing that while it is currently engulfed with flames, it isn't consumed. They are not looking at individuals who feel righteous anger and genuinely marveling that their faith in Jesus isn't consumed. That although their trust in the system is completely shattered - that their desire to have fellowship isn't consumed. That although their lifelong dreams of raising children in a seemingly idyllic tradition has crumbled - that their trust in a glorious God isn't consumed. That although they've borne abuse and neglect - that their hope in a righteous God isn't consumed. How can people be so thoroughly encompassed with fire, yet not consumed? It is because God is in it.

We are collectively a burning bush - completely encompassed with righteous anger - yet not consumed with despair because our faith is in the Living God. How can we speak of such horrifying crimes, such disgusting abuse of power, such wretched deceit, and still believe that there is beauty to attain to? Because we are burning, but not consumed. We ask that our fellowship stop trying to quench the righteous fire, and instead marvel that God is in His people.

So, how do we marvel at a church that is completely engulfed and not rush to quench it? This is how: we listen to people. We validate their broken trust. We learn from the most vulnerable, whose voices had long ago been silenced. We reach out our shaking

and weary hands to other hurting people. We focus on Jesus - the glorious and mighty Savior, and lay aside any falsehood that man or form is the answer to our salvation. And this is the point of our effort: to marvel at the church that should be destroyed, but somehow in its people, there's a kernel of genuine faith still very much alive.

A few weeks ago I was talking to a worker in my state. On this day they confided in me that it was hard to take criticism from individuals who are encompassed with righteous anger even though there is shared urgency. I said "I'll stand in the gap for you." I wasn't sure what that would look like, but I was genuine in my offer to take some of the heat. Shortly after, I was asked to be a host on this platform and I very much see myself in that place. Standing in the gap. Taking the heat of emotion and betrayal and distrust from a church in flames. Taking some of the heat and channeling those emotions into a more productive avenue of activism. All so that maybe, just maybe, we can have a stronger and healthier fellowship when the smoke clears.

RESPONSE TO WORKER'S LETTER

The below text is a combination of documents. For ease of reading:

Black Text: One worker's thoughts and concerns.

Green Text: Our team's answer to their concerns/questions.

Blue Text: Copied sections of the Encouraging Thoughts letter.

Dear Connected and Concerned Friends,

I have some questions and suggestions for this group (5 main questions, 5 main suggestions, 5 pages). There are many in this group that I know, love, and respect. I don't want them to be taken up in something that is evil and against the will of God.

I sure don't feel like I have all the answers and some of the things I say here could be totally wrong! Please forgive any of my misunderstandings. Thanks for giving me a safe place to share my feelings. Please consider and help me to be assured that this group is on the track:

QUESTIONS

1) What is the purpose of this group? **The purpose of our platform is to advocate for meaningful change within the fellowship we love, by focusing on Jesus instead of tradition.**

2) Where do you get your information? **The letters from workers are shared by members who get that information from their staff. CSA/SA news is typically received from the workers, personal accounts, or AFTT and Wings.**

3) Why are you doing what you are doing? **As stated above, our mission is to advocate for meaningful change within the fellowship (particularly CSA/SA and root causes of abuse).**

4) Who started this group? **This forum started as encouraging texts between friends and acquaintances. Shane and Devon developed an app to keep our conversations going in a more organized way. The rest of the team followed shortly after to share concerns, hope, and possible solutions.**

5) What is the end goal of this group? **Our team would love it if this community conversation led to a furthering of cooperation between the ministry and friends. Through cooperation we desire to enact changes that address CSA/SA abuse, root causes, communication, and a refocusing of the fellowship on Jesus instead of tradition.**

SUGGESTIONS

1) Don't Go Too Far

Sometimes a strong reaction is necessary. An extreme overreaction is never the answer. When you are driving you might get very close to the edge of the road. There is a real and significant danger. Does that mean you should jerk the wheel as hard and fast as you can away from the edge? You will probably roll the vehicle and get yourself and those riding with you killed or seriously injured. We are aware that the issue of child sexual abuse, sexual abuse in all its forms, is a very serious issue. The danger is real. Does that warrant an extreme overreaction? Emotions can cloud judgment. Emotions are high. Enemies of God and His people have been given great occasion to blaspheme. Old wounds have been torn open again. We can't let all of that cloud our vision. We shouldn't make hasty decisions. We must be sure they are the right ones. It is good that some have been outspoken about the issue for the sake of those who have suffered abuse and for the sake of our fellowship. I fear some might take liberties they shouldn't. Even if we are the victims of abuse or feel we should defend those who are or could be in danger of being, it gives us NO right to:

slander, harass, spread lies, falsely accuse, try to change the perfect way God has made, become self-righteous, or many other ways we could err.

We agree that no one should be spreading lies, slandering, or harassing anyone on the platform. Our Code of Conduct is clearly stated and we have a team of 13 people (currently) who monitor posts and comments in real time. An urgent and bold stance on CSA/SA and the examination of root causes is not an overreaction.

2) Be Realistic

Many have been hurt. Some assert that we need to “make sure this never happens again!” That is impossible. We can’t eliminate all risks. We would have to be all-knowing, all-powerful, and supervise everyone 24/7 so we could intervene when they are about to make an error. Even with our best of efforts and protocols, if people are involved, there will be risk. Should we put cameras in all of the families' homes? Should we put GPS trackers on everybody? Should we live in communes with glass walls so everybody is always supervised? Don’t let your emotions trump reason.

The traditions of our fellowship (particularly focusing on form/outward appearance, imbalance of power, and not wanting to “gossip”, etc.) have created a culture that allows perpetrators to operate with ease. No one is saying we should have cameras and GPS trackers. There are solutions that have proven effective at reducing abuse and we are advocating for those policies. (Zero-tolerance policies, prevention strategies, education, third party investigation of accusations, balance of power, transparency, communication, etc.)

3) Be Patient

People often urge us to “Do Something!”. It is said that caution is the greater part of wisdom. We are wise to be cautious. We are dealing with very serious issues and pressure to act can build rapidly. The immediate reaction is not always the best one.

We understand that policy changes, nationwide consistency, and the rebuilding of trust will take time. But patience is not the same as passivity. We hold patience for the process of meaningful changes, but we do not have patience for inaction and half hearted attempts.

4) Remember The Goal

I understand Connected and Concerned Friends to be a group wanting to help us address the issue of sexual abuse. Is it? I would hate for it to become:
- A hate group against God, His people, and His ministry.

- A group that uses the issue of sexual abuse as a weapon to advance its own personal agenda.

It would be shameful to use those who have suffered abuse to try and impose warped human ideas on the people of God.

CCF has always been about encouraging healthy and much needed change within the fellowship. There is no hidden agenda. Our fellowship will be strengthened (not weakened) by healthy examination, transparent communication, acknowledgment of wrong, and by advocating for meaningful policies and the lawful response to crimes.

5) Retract and Revise the 'SupportiveLetterToTheWorkers'.

I hope whoever put this letter together had good intentions. It seems full of misunderstanding. I found it alarming and offensive. It reflects very badly on the Connected and Concerned Friends group and perhaps completely misrepresents the opinions of the members. Here are my feelings and concerns:

"To the workers advocating for change"

Please explain 'change'. What kind of change are you looking for? Do you want better understanding of and action in dealing with the sexual abuse issue? That is a reasonable and much-needed change. Do you want to make the way of God and His ministry into what you want it to be in your human thinking? That never goes well.

Read Numbers 16 for one example.

The letter you are referenceing is a complilation of messages from members. This was a collaborative effort with no single author. The letter was sent by individuals who wanted to encourage their workers to listen and advocate for change. The change we are advocating for is an appropriet response to CSA/SA (which included: prevention, education, third party investigation of accusations, balance of power, transparency and communication.)

Reminder:

Blue text: Encouraging Thoughts letter (written by multiple individuals)

Black text: One worker's thoughts.

Green Text: Our team's response.

"We see you. We appreciate you. We care for you. We are so thankful for your continuous effort to restore trust and to create a safer community. We need

you. We can't imagine how tremendously difficult it is for you right now. You're hearing the desperate cries just as we are. You're processing the layers of betrayal and distrust just as we are. You're realizing how you've contributed to a silent and unsafe community, just as we are."

You are very quick to focus on the ministry, perhaps putting all blame on the ministry, but what about your part in contributing to a silent and unsafe community? Is it not more likely that all of us: Workers, Friends, parents, siblings, everybody, have had a lack of knowledge and action that has contributed to problems with sexual abuse?

We agree that there is need for everyone to be more thoroughly educated on CSA/SA and that a balance of power between friends and ministry would be a healthy and overdue change. However, recent revelations have shown that our system of ministry is especially conducive to these types of abuse. Despite parent's best efforts to keep children safe in their own homes and meetings, these abuses have continued to happen by authority figures (with the majority of those accusations involving workers). We are not "blaming" workers, we are observing that the patterns of abuse are particularly potent in our ministry. Part of our contribution to a safer community involves addressing the reason that these abuses are prevalent in the first place. Unfortunately, most efforts of addressing the systemic patterns of abuse have garnered little response or action from the ministry. We are willing to collaborate on this issue with friends and workers alike.

"There seems to be an expectation for you to suddenly get everything perfectly right without proper training. While you're still hurting. Sometimes your heartfelt, best-intentioned words are attacked, your intentions misinterpreted."

Those in this group don't seem to have any qualms about attacking and misinterpreting others, attacking and misinterpreting the ministry especially.

This was a statement from a member who seems to be expressing their understanding that there is a lot of expectation put on the workers. This statement was meant to convey compassion for the workers, not to attack the ministry. In terms of attacking language on our platform, our Code of Conduct clearly states that people in our community must share their feelings in a respectful way, and we have a team of moderators to hold that standard. We understand that you and others may feel uncomfortable reading certain comments, simply because of the nature of the topics we are discussing. If you feel like people are misunderstanding you, we encourage you to engage in a respectful conversation with them and explain your point of view.

"We see you trying, and for that we are so thankful. We want to encourage you to keep fighting, keep working for justice, for safety, for the victim-survivors, for the women, children, and men in the fellowship. It's ok if it's not perfect from the first try. We often learn best from the act of trying. We promise to do our best to be gracious and understanding with our feedback."

Thanks for this. We in the ministry need a lot of help and support and correction. I read many of the comments on the Connected and Concerned Friends site that give me the feeling of underlying resentment of the ministry. Can such a group adequately support the ministry in its efforts?

There is certainly a feeling of distrust and skepticism toward the workers by some of the friends. These feelings are a natural response to repeatedly witnessing victim stories being ignored, belittled, covered up, and dismissed by members of the ministry. In terms of our platform supporting the ministry, we believe that giving the community a place to share those feelings is how we begin the process of healing trust.

While all of this is going on, you're expected to maintain your position and routine in the ministry – continuing to visit homes, continuing gospel meetings and conventions, continuing to "be there" for everyone around you – while you're struggling to process everything yourself.

I'm glad you understand this.

We do, and we appreciate how exhausting this process is for everyone involved.

"The ministry you've given your life to has betrayed you. Your companions, your overseers, those you've looked to for guidance, those you've confided in."

The ministry has betrayed us? Really? That is an appalling accusation and misunderstanding. Some of our Friends have made very bad choices that hurt others. Do we say, "Our fellowship and Friends have betrayed us!?" No, it is INDIVIDUALS who have betrayed us.

I believe the betrayal that this member is referring to is the system of how our ministry operates (hierarchy, lack of transparency, no legal recourse) that has led to a culture where these crimes are able to happen and go unchecked.

"And yet, you continue to have a love for the ministry, a love for souls. And that's why you keep fighting. You know God is still reigning, that God is

righteous in His judgment and cares so deeply for the victim-survivors you're fighting for."

I agree God still reigns, is righteous in His judgment, and cares deeply for all hurt by abuse. You're not sure how much longer your boss is going to be in his position. And yet you feel compelled to continue under his direction. There are so many conflicting commands surrounding you: from the concerned, from the victim-survivors, from the young workers, from the head workers, from those asking you to be silent." Who is 'our boss'? Do you mean the overseer(s)? The overseer of the state I'm in is not my boss. He doesn't think he is and he doesn't want to be! This statement is a total misrepresentation of the ministry and overseers. I have spent a lot of time with several overseers. Sure, some overseers have done wrong and haven't been true to their calling. Does that make the rest of them wrong? Did Judas's failure make the rest of the apostles wrong? Did they need to totally reform the ministry because he fell? You seem to misunderstand the role of an overseer. An overseer isn't the one who 'makes all the decisions' and 'has absolute authority', though he certainly gets blamed for decisions if people don't like them! It is not a position we covet for personal gain. Sisters and brothers aren't standing in line to become overseers. The burdens and responsibilities are great. The pressure is great. The criticism is great as Connected and Concerned Friends and other groups undeniably prove. It is horrible that you would disrespect overseers as a whole, men who are giving their lives and are willing to fill such a difficult role.

We do not disrespect overseers as a whole, but the characterization that overseers do not have the authority is not true. We need a culture of introspection that examines this hierarchy so that a multitude of diverse perspectives can help guide the fellowship forward.

We in the ministry, overseers included, are servants working together. We are subject to God, each other, and the needs of all. God is our boss and He will be in power forever. It is appalling to say that someone else is 'our boss'.

This was a comment from a member, and the term "boss" was an unfortunate choice. I think we can understand that this person was referring to the very obvious fact that the overseer holds some authority over other workers. Just like all of us have a natural boss at work, your overseer is yours. They are the ones who assign what field you preach in, which companion you will be with, where to go for convention preparations, etc. Again, the word that this individual chose wasn't helpful, but it also wasn't inaccurate.

"We encourage you to continue to listen to the voice that matters the most: our Heavenly Father's. And while we long to be an encouragement and support to

you, we know that He is the greatest source of comfort, hope, and support for you, as well as us."

That's good advice! This letter seems like poisoned honey; there are some good thoughts, but also many that are toxic.

An encouragement to examine root causes and traditions may be uncomfortable, but it is not toxic.

"And here are some words of encouragement that folks from our group (a group of nearly 1400 friends supporting you)"

Our group. I thought we were the family of God and all in this together. Why do you need to organize into a special group? Whenever people organize in such a way, it typically doesn't lead to good things. They feed on each other's anger and misunderstanding and feel empowered to go beyond what is true, right, decent, and acceptable. Mob mentality enters into the picture. I hope this group hasn't become or doesn't become a hate group against workers, against God, and against His people.

Again, this forum is moderated and held to the standard of our Code of Conduct. This forum hopes to encourage change from within the fellowship, not form a hate group outside of it. In terms of organizing, Human beings naturally organize. Conventions, meetings, worker state staff's, and work days are other examples of ways that humans organize into groups of people. Cultural bias is a genuine concern for any large group, including our fellowship as a whole, so we must be diligent to focus on Jesus.

"Truth sets us free. Any delay in removing predators implies guilt or complicity. Survivors have waited decades, years to feel safe in fellowship. Thank you for ensuring meetings are a refuge, not a torture chamber."

I can see the importance of dealing with predators wisely, which could involve conviction, removal from fellowship, whatever is appropriate. I can see the importance of being sensitive to those who have suffered abuse and not forcing them to be in company with a person(s) who would make them feel unsafe. I feel like supporting those who have suffered abuse is a critical issue in all that has happened lately.

However, this letter makes it seem like the two ways this group wants to accomplish this are:

1) Take control of the ministry. **Untrue. We wish to work alongside workers in the ministry.**

2) Attack those who have been accused of sexual abuse. **Perpetrators of sexual abuse must be handled by professionals. We have no desire to attack individuals, but discussing their actions may feel unsavory based on the nature of those crimes.**

There is a lot more to helping the problem than removing known predators and somehow reforming the ministry: **Yes. We must examine root causes.**

Removing known predators is important, but what about supporting those who have made mistakes and repented? **Yes. Professionals can support perpetrators. We are not the judge of any person's salvation, and their fellowship needs can be met in many ways outside of meeting.**

How do we keep children safe from those who we don't know are sexual predators? **Education, prevention systems (such as provided by GRACE organization), and meaningful no tolerance policies.**

How do we balance trust and precaution? **Meaningful policies, transparency, and communication will result in both protection for children and an increase in trust.**

What about fostering love and having a conscience toward God, rather than police force and written policies? What about the unity of the Spirit rather than unity of political will? **Love toward God motivates us to advocate for meaningful policies to protect our most vulnerable. The Spirit will always move us to protect and serve one another.**

What about actually wanting God's will to be done rather than our own? **Jesus protected the vulnerable, defended the children, cared for the widows, and provided for the poor - the Will of God is very clearly in favor of protecting the vulnerable.**

What about teaching your children, while they are in a safe environment, how to keep safe when they are out in the world? **Yes, parents have been doing this for generations. Ironically, parent's feel that keeping their children safe in public situations is less difficult than keeping them safe from perpetrators in their meetings and homes.**

What about making Jesus the priority in a family's home? **Of course.**

What about maintaining a good spirit in the home? **Of course.**

I fear for the children whose parents are involved in a group that would have such tunnel vision and misunderstanding. What kind of spirit are those parents bringing into their home? A spirit of hate and disrespect for the ministry? A spirit of pride and self-righteousness? A spirit of scorn and vengeance? Hopefully nobody in this group has that kind of a spirit and I am simply misunderstanding where you are coming from. You really need to revise this letter if that is the case.

Being aware of problems isn't the same as having a spirit of hatred. The feeling of righteous anger is not the spirit of disrespect. The feeling of urgency isn't the spirit of pride. When faced with such wretched crimes and deeds within our own fellowship, we absolutely should feel alert, angry, urgent, and motivated to do something. These are appropriate feelings to experience and help to teach our children the importance of valuing and helping the vulnerable.

"Jesus doesn't change, but we must. For all of these years, we have not. Seems like we've focused more on Paul than on Jesus (more on appearance than the weightier matters). We completely support all of your efforts to be more like Jesus. We are trying to do the same."

Where did this thought come from? Have you even read Acts and Paul's letters? If that's what we get from his life and teachings, we don't understand Paul at all. Paul encouraged those he wrote to and labored among to focus on Jesus. He was focused on the weighty matters. Paul's life and writings help us to focus on Jesus. If we began focusing on Paul, wouldn't we realize he points us to Jesus as the One we should focus on? Of course, we as humans are prone to focusing on appearance rather than what is really important, but to say that Paul has led us astray to focus on appearance rather than the weighty matters is nonsense.

This comment from a member may have been well meaning, but we agree, does misunderstand Paul.

"We are here, "waiting in the wings" to help with anything we possibly can. To support you, to work with you, to facilitate the needed changes within our fellowship. Please don't hesitate to reach out with anything we can do to be of help for the greater work currently happening.

Finally, if you are not ok, that is ok. There is support available, and it is ok to seek out that support. With a unified purpose for truth, honesty, and God's will to be done, Connected & Concerned Friends"

Nice words, but I wish the rest of the letter gave me more confidence in the group. Based on other parts of the letter, if I needed help, I would certainly go elsewhere.

There are many resources available, and we encourage you to find help and support in the way that best serves you.

ANALYSIS OF LETTER BY A CCF GROUP PROFESSIONAL

When we are discussing issues as complex and vulnerable as child and adult sexual abuse within a church, a bilateral and ongoing conversation is ideal. It could be unwise to attempt to understand the heart and mind of a representative of the ministry based on this letter. Still, there are questions we might ask, things we might be curious about.

- “What is it you feel?” Despite using the word “feel” and “feeling” 8 times through this letter, the writer does not share with us what they are feeling. Relational communication includes vulnerability, the sharing of one’s own feelings and curiosity about the other’s feelings, thoughts, motives. Our Father and our older Brother, and the Holy Spirit, are fully expressive of their feelings, giving them words, and intensity, and value. We may have gender, ethnic, cultural, or familial reasons for discomfort with feelings, but our Creator does not.
- Despite not identifying their own feelings, the writer expresses significant mistrust, fear, and anger towards the leaders and participants in Connected and Concerned Friends, including fear of those involved forming a “hate group.” We could ask, “What is it that you most fear?” When we are not in touch with our own fear, we are in danger of projecting unkind motives onto others, to misunderstanding others, to moving into extreme stances that make it more difficult to connect.
- “Who are you protecting?” While the writer states a wish to take appropriate action for the protection of victims of sexual abuse, the letter focuses on false allegations, dismantling or discrediting of the ministry, “extreme overreaction,” C&CF using sexual abuse as a Trojan horse for forum member’s personal agendas, the difficult and unrewarding role of overseer, and much more.
- “Is it ok for the ministry and friends to see things differently? Do you believe friends can have a personal connection to God, be led by the Holy Spirit, and have revelations from scripture?” Throughout the letter, while the author acknowledges that they don’t “have all the answers” and need to be forgiven for any “misunderstandings,” they also state they “don’t want [the members] to be taken up in something that is evil

and against the will of God”, give strong warnings through a metaphor about driving too close to the edge of the road, urge the readers to “be realistic,” “be patient,” “remember the goal,” “retract and revise the letter to workers,” speak out against mob mentality, and 3 times opine that friends are forming a hate group and/or fostering a spirit of hate for the ministry.

- “What do you see as a better path forward?” Unfortunately, much of the letter is written using logical fallacies:
 - Slippery slope and straw man: The author states that the forum is working to “make sure [csa/sa] never happens again” (a straw man, as that is not the stated goal of the forum) and then attacks that with a slippery slope argument that things will go too far and we will end up using GPS trackers, video monitors in every home, and glass-wall communes.
 - False equivalence: In speaking of the role of overseers and the ministry, the author attempts to narrate the responsibility as belonging to “INDIVIDUALS” rather than accepting responsibility and accountability as one member of the larger ministry.
 - Straw man (again): By repeatedly accusing the forum of being a “hate group,” a group that is using child sexual abuse as a tool to advance its own personal agenda, and other hostile views, the writer has created their own license to discredit the group. (Note: It is unclear how the author believes 2000+ have come together non-anonymously to advance a destructive agenda against the ministry.)
 - Red herring: By focusing on the writer’s fears about the group, attention is taken away from the issue of child sexual abuse by ministers and friends; lack of meaningful repentance or acknowledgement from the ministry for its role; lack of transparency from the ministry about communication, decisions, overseer meetings; state or national policy; or law enforcement involvement.

While logical fallacies do not automatically destroy effective communication, they hinder it. The listener is left sorting through the illogic, confused and baffled by what is being communicated. The focus is taken away from the original concern. When

reading this letter, the reader knows the routes the writer does not want to take but does not hear what the writer considers a better path forward.

- “What do you value?” The writer states their desire to deal with the issue of sexual abuse of children and adults, but most of the letter is focused on maintaining the `status quo, expressing negative thoughts about the believed intentions of forum members, and critiquing the content of the Letter to Workers.

Our concerns about this letter and ideas presented in it:

Our faith group has been long plagued by sexual abuse of children and adults, the hiding and enabling of that abuse, as well as lack of transparency or communication about the structure, power, and finances of the authorities: Overseers, workers, elders. While many have been suffering from the abuse for generations, some have become newly aware of the depth and breadth of the problem. People feel betrayed, deeply wounded, mistrustful, afraid, sick, devastated. It is in this climate that this worker’s letter was written and attempted to be publicly posted on Connected and Concerned Friends. (Sources, see CSA and SA News, WingsfortheTruth.info, AdvocatesfortheTruth.com)

Here is what a survivor might notice in this letter:

(Please note: survivors will have a variety of responses, and all responses are valid, legitimate, and understandable. We do not speak for all survivors and encourage survivors to speak for themselves if they feel safe doing so)

- The writer offers no plan of action.
- The writer does not connect empathetically with survivors in any meaningful way, and it is not clear that the writer has attempted to understand the experience of sexual abuse of a child or adult. The writer lacks empathy or understanding and may benefit from reading survivor’s accounts of their abuse.
- The writer minimizes the ministry’s role in an apparent attempt to shift the shame and blame to “individuals” and friends. Rather than using their role in the ministry to accept blame, responsibility, and accountability for those who will not accept those things (as Jesus did for all of us), the survivor may see the writer distancing from all accountability and responsibility.

- The writer focuses on the possibility of false allegations and protection of perpetrators in the lines: "Attack those who have been accused of sexual abuse" and that we have no right to "...slander, harass, spread lies, falsely accuse, try to change the perfect way God has made, become self-righteous, or many other ways we could err." From a survivor's viewpoint, it is clear the author has strong suspicions that there are many false allegations. A survivor would likely not trust this writer to believe his or her experience of sexual abuse. The author will likely be seen as lacking in empathy to understand what it costs for a victim to come forward and speak their shameful story.
- While the writer states the ministry and friends should be united and not in separate groups, a survivor will also notice that they repeatedly defend the ministry, attack the friends, speak against false allegations, and do not offer meaningful protection for abuse survivors or prevention of further abuse.
- In reading the logical fallacies noted above, a survivor may feel characterized as hysterical, overreacting, disbelieved, unprotected, maligned, and suspected of being resentful, hateful, or rebellious...due to joining a community of friends who are finally boldly, consistently speaking out against violation, deceit, mismanaged power, oppressive traditions, and unlawfulness (both in committing crimes and then covering them up).
- In the author's denial of the power of even the overseer, the survivor will understand that the writer either cannot see power and oppression or is so far unwilling to admit their existence, which is in itself a blindly privileged stance. The survivor may conclude that the writer is unwilling to use their power and privilege for the good of survivors but is instead committed to pretending it does not exist.

Here is how a survivor might feel upon reading this letter:

Hurt, confused, angry, betrayed, helpless, shocked, horrified, powerless, ashamed, withdrawn, mistrusting.

Closing comments:

- The ministry and the church are not equal and not the same parts of the body. The ministry needs to take responsibility for what they own,

and the church does also. (see “differentiation,” “boundaries,” “authoritarian versus authoritative”)

- It is ok for one crisis to open a much larger conversation. People are trying to understand how sexual abuse of children and adults could have been a problem for as long as it has, and they are looking at all the possible factors. (see “systemic change” and “first- and second-order change”)
- Open discourse can be healthy. Truth, goodness, beauty, and truth can withstand the challenges of examination and discussion (see all the stories of Jesus talking about uncomfortable things; “open systems” versus “closed systems”).
- Relationships between people and parts of a church work better when both are willing to listen, truly, curiously, with an open heart and mind, and without suspicion. (see “reflective listening”).
- Due to the nature of this crisis, with ministry violating the church, repeatedly hiding that violation, and moving workers around, the onus of listening is on the ministry. It is problematic for the ministry to ask the church to tend to their needs for two reasons: The ministry has betrayed the church. The ministry is in a position of power over the church. (see Diane Langberg’s book *Redeeming Power* for a discussion of good use of power and authority).
- What a survivor may want to see instead are:
 - Accountability
 - Transparency
 - Empathy and compassion
 - Respect for boundaries
 - Commitment to restoration and justice
 - Humility and willingness to seek outside help

To find a path forward, significant relational repair will be needed. Unfortunately, the thoughts and beliefs expressed in this letter do more to wound those harmed by sexual abuse and the church that is trying to protect them and prevent future abuse.

*** **NOTE***** CCF have received feedback to this letter. See the PDF below.

[Worker's Response to CCF Letter](#)

The original letter from the worker to the CCF Group

[worker-letter-to-connected-and-concerned-friendsDownload](#)