

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?**
- 2) Where do you get your information?**
- 3) Why are you doing what you are doing?**
- 4) Who started this group?**
- 5) What is the end goal of this group?**

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

"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?

"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.

"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?

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.

“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.

“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 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'.

“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.

"These are a few of the things we've been sharing in the "Encouraging Thoughts" portion of our group."

"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.

"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.
- 2) Attack those who have been accused of sexual abuse.

There is a lot more to helping the problem than removing known predators and somehow reforming the ministry:

Removing known predators is important, but what about supporting those who have made mistakes and repented?

How do we keep children safe from those who we don't know are sexual predators?

How do we balance trust and precaution?

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?

What about actually wanting God's will to be done rather than our own?

What about teaching your children, while they are in a safe environment, how to keep safe when they are out in the world?

What about making Jesus the priority in a family's home?

What about maintaining a good spirit in the home?

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.

"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.

"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.