

## ANALYSIS OF LETTER BY A CCF GROUP PROFESSIONAL

### What kind of professional wrote this?

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.

I feel hurt, sad, disappointed, ashamed, angry. I’m hurt that so many have had to suffer and are suffering. I’m sad that trust has been broken. I feel ashamed of any part that the ministry, the elders, our friends, and I have had in allowing abuse to take place and not be dealt with properly. I’m angry that sexual abuse has occurred and even been covered up.

- 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.

I fear that groups like Connected and Concerned Friends would have wrong motives and go against the will of God. I believe such groups can’t destroy God’s way or people or ministry, but they can lead many astray and bring condemnation upon themselves. There are people in Connected and Concerned Friends who are not even going to meetings. Some of what is shared there is anti-truth nonsense like the belief that William Irvine started our fellowship.

- “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.

I’m sorry if I made it sound like I believe Connected and Concerned Friends is doing these things, I simply am concerned that they MIGHT be doing them or will get to the point of doing them in the future. I want to understand more about the group to see that it is not the case. I think those are legitimate concerns to have of such a group.

• “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.

Are these not valid concerns to have of a group?

I didn’t “opine” that the friends are forming a hate group. I don’t want our friends to be forming a hate group and hope they aren’t. Read closely:

**“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. “

**“I hope this group hasn’t become or doesn’t become a hate group** against workers, against God, and against His people. “

• “What do you see as a better path forward?” Unfortunately, much of the letter is written using logical fallacies:

I think the first step is to pray and ask God what we should do about all of these issues. I hope that is what Connected and Concerned Friends is doing. If the Lord is leading the group, I know it will turn out well and accomplish what needs to be done.

o 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.

I never stated that was what the forum is doing... I said, “Some assert that we need to ‘make sure this never happens again!’” Some people seem to have that feeling. I am more confident that Connected and Concerned Friends as a whole doesn’t feel that way. It seems like the group agrees that we shouldn’t do what is unrealistic.

o 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.

I’m sorry I didn’t make it clear enough that I do feel responsible. “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?” I don’t feel like the ministry has betrayed us, though. I don’t feel like our elders or friends have betrayed us. I do think it is more accurate to say that individuals have betrayed us rather than “the ministry”. From my experience, most of us in the fellowship are loyal servants of God wanting to do what is right. I acknowledge we have had a lack of understanding and action. I really regret that.

o 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.)

Again, I didn’t accuse the forum of these things. I want to be assured that it is NOT that kind of a group. People have risen up against the ministry for wrong reasons before. Read Numbers 16. Is it not a valid concern? Speaking of logical fallacies, just because 2,000 + people get together, that means they **won’t** advance a destructive agenda against the ministry? Argumentum ad populum?

o 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.

Sexual abuse is a great concern to me and likely most of us. I think it is necessary to examine the other motives that might be behind Connected and Concerned Friends. I thought the group wanted proper, thorough examination of issues. The motives of a group are an important issue.

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.

This “professional” misconstrued things I wrote. I hope that wasn’t his/her intent. I acknowledge I’m not eloquent and can be prone to logical errors.

- “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.

If you send out a mass letter, surely we can critique it, especially if it represents the views of a group that is trying to create change.

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.

I didn't want to give that impression. I think we should all be willing to take blame and responsibility that is due.

\*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.

That is a good thing to know! I would hate to discourage anybody from sharing their story of abuse and getting the help they need and action taken to deal with the abuser. From what I am beginning to understand, false allegations of sexual abuse are rare.

\*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.

I don't deny that overseers have power. They don't have "absolute authority" which is what I mentioned in my letter. From my experience, overseers I've been with have included other workers, our friends, and our elders on many decisions. They have been good servants from what I've seen. They haven't been perfect, it is true. I can see how an individual could go beyond the limits of his authority or use his position for an evil purpose.

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

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

I would hate to make anybody feel these things and I'm sorry if that was the case!

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")

It does seem like some good has come from this crisis.

- 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").

I was thinking the other day that truth is easier to defend than lies.

- 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

These all seem like good qualities to have and they would definitely help the situation.

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.

●● suggested to me that he didn’t think it would help to post it in Connected and Concerned Friends. I agreed it would be better to not post it. Now the hosts have posted it. I am reluctant to write anything more to Connected and Concerned Friends, but I felt I needed to share these thoughts, anyways. I really appreciate the time and attention they’ve given to me and to the issue of sexual abuse and how to address it.