

Background

As of June 2024, there have been over 1,500 credible disclosures identifying over 910 perpetrators of Sexual Abuse (SA) and Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) within our fellowship. These allegations span the globe, and although some reach back to the 1930's, the majority stem from abuse perpetrated between 1960 and 2000. They implicate abusers in all parts of the fellowship including workers, elders and friends.

Many of these abuses were not undisclosed; rather, they were known by someone within the fellowship who had the ability to intervene, yet for one reason or another, did not. One of our biggest failings has been our ignorance of the devastating nature of child sexual abuse. Often we were unaware of grooming, uneducated regarding the propensity to reoffend, and blinded to the depth of lasting damage that is done. The lack of appropriate action frequently resulted in no consequences for the perpetrator, while the victims were left on their own, disbelieved or silenced. Perpetrators were moved to different areas without any communication, which often perpetuated the cycle of abuse while leaving others unaware of potential dangers. Addressing abuses rarely involved legal authorities, experts, or consultation with professional resources.

Although it's true that many organizations have faced similar issues, it is imperative to acknowledge that the scope of the problem within our own fellowship is just as severe as other cases that have made headlines in recent years. The following are some unique elements in our fellowship that have contributed to the perpetuation of sexual abuse:

- Much of our fellowship centers around the home, including having the ministry stay with families and meetings occurring in the home. The intimacy and access related to being in this setting creates conditions that have led to many instances of sexual abuse.
- We have tended to view abuse as sin, rather than both as a sin and a crime, which has enabled sexual abuse to thrive in secrecy and silence. It is very difficult to talk openly about CSA/SA., as we have prioritized peace, unity, and forgiveness at the expense of addressing these issues.
- The fellowship has no formal guidelines or policies (written or unwritten) to address sexual abuse. Rather, decisions were made by individuals without appropriate professional backgrounds and often without regard for the victim survivors and overall safety of the fellowship. This approach has led to harm and trauma for many.

The acknowledgement and understanding of these elements heightened the urgency of developing effective, written guidelines that meet legal and professional standards for dealing with sexual abuse. Silence and avoidance only serve to perpetuate harm and are not acceptable responses. It's essential to openly confront sexual abuse in order to effectively deal with it. We need to recognize the gravity of abuse both as a sin and a crime, respond to it appropriately, and learn to be proactive in order to create a safe environment. This will lead us to creating a safer environment for everyone in our fellowship.