

**Submission to Inquiry into the Handling
of Child Abuse by Religious and Other
Non-Government Organisations**

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Introduction

WINGS has been created by victims/survivors who have suffered sexual abuse within the Friends and Workers church fellowship (please refer to appendix 1- Fact Sheet for the Friends and Worker Church Without a Name) along with individuals who have been both directly and indirectly impacted by CSA.

WINGS is a world-wide online organisation with admins in the United States of America, Canada, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Our members are made up of current and former members of the Friends and Workers church fellowship.

Our objective is to provide information, support and guidance to every individual on every aspect of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), and to shed light on the prevalence of these abuses within the fellowship. Our ultimate hope is to encourage change within the fellowship in order to protect others from the devastation that occurs when CSA is minimized and or ultimately ignored.

Through networking with other victims/survivors, we can be more effective agents for change. Through learning that our stories are not isolated, we can become less isolated emotionally which will have an exponential impact on our individual healing processes.

Abuse is made possible by secrecy and shame; healing can be made possible by the honesty, courage, pain and anger, which we can channel toward reaching the following goals:

1. To protect others.
2. To encourage and support the establishment of "church" policies that effectively address the problem of CSA within the fellowship, the healing processes of members as well as victims/survivors, and the proper handling of its perpetrators.
3. Turn the "Truth" fellowship into an UN-safe place for perpetrators by educating members about prevention and protection.

Although abuse happens in every denomination, WINGS is limited to the Friends and Workers church fellowship for several reasons:

1. The fellowship holds in common many unique doctrines and beliefs, often striving to be "different" and set apart.
2. The fellowship has isolated themselves from the larger community of Christianity which has resulted in a prevailing belief that the Friends and Workers church fellowship is not susceptible to abuses plaguing other denominations or that the law does not apply.
3. The lack of effective administrative procedures for helping primary and secondary victims/survivors heal from abuse within the group has resulted in the silencing of victims/survivors who are too intimidated and traumatized to speak out publicly about the injustices that they have suffered at the hands of workers, elders and friends.
4. The two-tier system elevating workers often leads to denial and lack of support for victims from family members/friends leaving victims with a sense of having nowhere to go. WINGS provides a safe forum where victims are understood and believed.

WINGS became aware of an emerging pattern of CSA and cover-up within the state of Victoria in 2010, when a member of the church took initial steps to confront the abuse she had suffered over a five year duration from a senior Brother Worker. Dissatisfied with response she received she made a formal complaint to police. [REDACTED] was

subsequently charged and pleaded guilty. He was sentenced to six months in prison. An appeal later reduced the sentence to a two year suspended sentence. WINGS has learned of another 12 women who felt unable to make statements regarding their own experiences involving [REDACTED]

During the investigation WINGS received information regarding CSA allegations of a second brother worker, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Both victims feel unable to continue pursuing the claims at this time.

[REDACTED]

WINGS has also received second-hand reports of several other Workers on the Victorian and Tasmanian staff that are alleged to have sexually abused minors and in some cases, vulnerable adults. Usually the victims of such alleged incidents are unwilling to personally lodge a complaint and information leaks out from friends in whom the victims have confided.

Contact Details

Further contact with WINGS can be obtained through:

<http://www.wingsfortruth.info/contactus.htm>

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or not they intended to go to authorities. Many of the victims had not shared their story with anyone including family prior to the phone call. It is not surprising, given the culture of the group, that only one of thirteen known victims was prepared to formalize her statement and continue legal proceedings. [REDACTED] was subsequently given a suspended sentence of 6 months upon appeal, and he was supported in court by forensic psychologist [REDACTED]. The court was unaware of the chronic offending of [REDACTED] over many years. Wings is aware of 13 victims who allege they were sexually abused as children by Mr Barry, some over extended periods and in their family homes, on church convention grounds and in public places (<http://wingsbts.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=lounge&action=display&thread=80>).

Protocols

- We have heard from one of our admin team who spoke with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] that the Victorian Workers have developed a set of protocols for dealing with CSA. To date we have not sighted the protocols. Our observation of a current case indicates that the protocols (if in use) are far from satisfactory including:
 - The selective practice of passing on contact details to investigating authorities. We have been advised that the offender was included in deciding which family's contact details are passed onto investigating police officers
 - Selective circulation within the friends of information letters regarding the case. Some families are yet to be contacted despite having the alleged offender live with them on a number of occasions and having young children in the house
 - Ex-members of the group have not been informed of the current investigation by Workers. They have relied on message boards such as WINGS "Breaking The Silence" (<http://wingsbts.proboards.com/index.cgi>) and the "Truth Meetings Board - WINGS subsection" (<http://professing.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=wings>) for information. It is important to acknowledge however, that WINGS has heard that the contact made by ex-members to Workers regarding the situation has been cordial, with several sister Workers making themselves available to discuss the situation.

- [REDACTED]

Policies

As explained in the church fact sheet, the church is not organised formally and has no written policies that are available to the general public. This includes policies on dealing with CSA. This has been a concern to a number of church members and late last year a document was produced by a group of members with help from professionals in the field of sexual abuse (<https://sites.google.com/site/csacodeofconduct/>) This document aims to reduce the potential for CSA, establish accepted process for use in the instance of child sexual abuse allegations and promote cooperative relationships with law enforcement agencies. This document was sent to a number of church Overseers throughout the world [REDACTED] late last year, however it is unclear if it has been accepted or if the guidelines have been implemented. In fact we have heard that in some areas it has been

dismissed on the basis that "we are not an organisation" and therefore don't require such things.

Part 2

whether there are systemic practices in such organisations that operate to preclude or discourage the reporting of suspected criminal abuse of children to State authorities

Historically among the Friends and Workers there has been a misapplication of 1 Corinthians 6:

6 If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? 2 Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!

7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters. 9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. NIV

The Friends and Workers in Victoria largely believe (there are some families who are the exception) that these verses indicate that they should not use the civil legal avenues available to them to address any grievances against their fellow group members (including Workers). Instead they will sometimes approach their local church Elder or a senior Brother Worker for advice and/or assistance in the matter. Unfortunately, due to a lack of appropriate protocols, this has led to a practice "keeping things quiet for the sake of the Fellowship" (in effect, sweeping it under the carpet) with concerned parents being instructed to stay silent in regard to reporting. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] While these events occurred in NSW they are reflective of the culture of the Friends and Workers within Victoria as well.

WINGS is aware of situations in the past where families have been threatened with excommunication if they report the matter to authorities or don't meekly accept the advice from Workers, often to do nothing. If a member is dissatisfied with how a situation is handled by the Workers and is vocal in expressing it, this can lead to shunning of the person and the story that gets spread is that the disaffected person "has problems". The threat of excommunication is particularly powerful because of the widespread belief that membership of the F&W church fellowship is the only way to salvation.

Within the more recent cases of CSA reporting WINGS is aware that some senior Workers are still attempting to block victims' rights to the legal process. One recent victim was asked by a senior Worker if "she really wanted to open that can of worms" when seeking

advice how she should proceed. Another victim (although not from Victoria) was instructed to "heal herself in silence".

It is important to acknowledge that Workers are held in high esteem amongst the Friends in Victoria. The recent cases of CSA have been met with feelings of shock and disbelief. Many of the Friends are unable to comprehend the seriousness of the abuse claims. The lack of information and secrecy surrounding each case, WINGS believes, has led to the Friends dismissing the events as "one bad apple" and "that was before he was professing". Consequently there is little support and a lot of ill feeling towards the victims. WINGS is aware that a process of "shunning" has occurred even towards victims who have not reported to outside authorities. It is important to understand that many Friends believe that being a member of the Friends and Workers Church is their only opportunity for salvation, consequently "shunning" and threats of excommunication are extremely effective deterrents to reporting situations of abuse to authorities.

Part 3

and whether changes to law or to practices, policies and protocols in such organisations are required to help prevent criminal abuse of children by personnel in such organisations and to deal with allegations of such abuse.

It is our opinion, at WINGS, that there is an urgent need for transparency and clear communication between Workers and Friends in regard to CSA reporting. We realize that it is highly unlikely that this change will occur within any timeframe unless there is a mandated requirement to do so. It is for this reason that we urge this enquiry to support mandatory reporting for clergy and lay people within churches.

Within the next twelve months however we would suggest the following changes should be made:

- Protocols for handling CSA need to be adopted by the Workers and published for the friends to see and understand. This must include Protocols for reporting suspected situations of CSA and offenders
- Protocols need to be developed around the practice of Worker staying in Friend's homes to ensure safe practices are adopted
- Protocols need to be developed to ensure the safety of children at Conventions and Special Meetings
- Communication between Workers and friends needs to be transparent when dealing with CSA matters including ensuring all members (regardless of their standing) be informed about the situation
- All Workers and Elders should be required to participate in professional development regarding their moral obligation to report and or encourage parents to report CSA.

Appendix 1

Fact Sheet for the 'Friends and Workers' Church Without A Name

Also Known As: The Truth, The Friends, The Workers, The Two-by-Twos, The Cooneyites, The Way

Characteristics:

- Name: Claim to take no official name, but are often called: "The Truth, The Friends and Workers, The Way, The Two-by-Two's, The Cooneyites," etc. In Australia they have used the name "*The United Christian Conventions of Australia and New Zealand*" or variations on official correspondence.
- Non-denominational protestant home-church.
- A celibate ministry comprised of male and female ministers.
- Homeless itinerant ministry that goes about the role of preaching in pairs "two-by-two".
- A fundamental belief that this is the only true church established by Christ on earth and that eternal salvation is only possible by belonging to this church.

GOVERNMENT

Organisation: The church contends that it is not an organisation, religion or a denomination; non-incorporated, not registered for taxation purposes, not tax-exempt as far as members are aware. No registered headquarters. The ruling workers are not held accountable to the church membership on matters including use of finances nor moral issues such as how allegations of sexual abuse are dealt with.

Members: Called: "the friends".

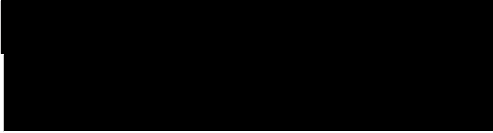
Clergy: Called: "workers" who have the role and authority of ministers but with little emphasis on pastoral duties. The ministry shun formal religious training in bible college and education in original Bible languages or history of the wider Christian church. Workers are itinerant, traveling in same-sex pairs and living almost exclusively with and in the homes of group members. Amongst attending members it is considered an honor to host the workers. Visits usually last for a week, however sometimes can be longer. Workers do not collect or earn an income but accept donations from groups members towards living expenses.

In each state the workers are organized into a strict hierarchy of:

- Overseer (male)
- Senior brother workers

- Senior sister workers
- Brother workers (junior)
- Sister workers (junior)

In Victoria the current overseer is believed to be:



Hierarchy: States are controlled by the overseer or head worker who assigns fields to workers under his authority. Each field contains various home churches, where generally between 10 and 25 members meet, over which an "elder" presides. All overseers and elders are men. All authority for appointments within the church, including which home members attend for meeting, is vested in the state overseer.

When an overseer dies or is otherwise incapacitated, the other head workers in the appropriate region will meet to appoint the successor, who has often already been chosen by the retiring overseer. Members of the church have no say in this process and often are not informed of the change in leadership, only finding out via "the grapevine".

Day of Worship: Sunday is considered the day of worship and rest on which all work ceases.

Bible: Traditionally the King James Version was used almost exclusively in English-speaking areas. In recent times, use of other bible translations is more common-place including the use of the NIV especially for home reading. Some workers are also making use of other translations.

Hymnal: Use their own compilation: Hymns Old and New published by R. L. Allan & Son, England, the most recent version being that of 1987.

Ordinances: Observe baptism by complete immersion; oppose infant baptism and sprinkling. Communion (bread and grape juice or wine in a common cup) is served every Sunday, reserved for baptised members approved by ministers.

Conversion: Public profession in a public group meeting is usually required to become a member. Previous baptisms are not recognized, and a convert must be baptized into this faith.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Taboos: The church claim they have no rules or regulations beyond those instigated by Christ. Some taboos or expectations vary according to locality. The following unwritten taboos were traditionally recognized by the entire group as being unacceptable: televisions, radios, movies, stereos, smoking, drinking, illegal drug use, swearing, gambling, dancing, reading Christian books or literature, Christian symbols, current fads and fashions, jewelry (except for wedding rings, pins and watches). Many of these are now honored in the breach, especially by the younger members. No short hair, make-up, slacks or shorts for women. No long hair for men. Women are expected to dress very modestly and wear their long hair uncut and pinned up on their head

Services: Two principal types:

(1) Sunday worship and midweek bible-study fellowship meetings in a home: participation by members in prayers, testimonies and hymns. Sunday fellowship meetings are usually held in the home of the assigned elder. Wednesday night meetings usually rotate through the homes of well-regarded friends.

(2) Series of gospel meetings conducted by the workers for the purpose of teaching and converting non-members. Gospel meetings are usually held in public rented spaces such as schools or town halls.

Special Events:

(1) Special meetings. Usually held mid-year in a rented public space. Special meetings are held on a Sunday with morning and afternoon meetings.

(2) Conventions. Grew out of the Keswick tradition in the UK. Held annually in most regions over four days, three meetings per day. Size ranges from 300 to 500 attendees. Members are strongly urged to attend one complete convention per year. Convention properties are owned by approved members. Buildings are constructed with funds donated by members. In some countries Conventions may be registered for the purpose of camp grounds with local authorities and would be expected to comply with local hygiene and safety regulations.

In Victoria conventions are held at:

- *Thoona*
- *Speed*
- *Drouin (two conventions)*
- *Colac*

During convention time the friends are encouraged to sleep onsite in tents provided. Sleeping arrangements are strictly separated into same sex with the meeting shed in the

middle. At some convention grounds there are some male communal sleeping halls (or large tents). Workers have their own sleeping quarters.

Preparations are held before each convention. The friends are encouraged to attend working bees on the Saturdays in lead-up to each convention. Midweek preparations also occur. It is considered an honor for older teenagers to be invited to attend midweek preparations (which usually occur without parental supervision). Potential workers are usually encouraged to stay at the convention grounds with the workers during midweek preparations.

Census: No census records of membership available. Member estimates range between 150,000 and 250,000 worldwide. Worldwide, numbers have dwindled in recent times due to natural attrition with little new growth, and a substantial exodus by former members partly due to internet publicity.

In Victoria there is an estimated 2,000 members.

Outreach: Worldwide, except where Christianity is not allowed to be preached.

Controls: Characterised by rigid authoritarianism. Workers have authority in all matters and the head worker has absolute authority. The authority derives from the fear of members resulting from the exclusivist belief of the church as being the only right way. Workers are upheld as God's representatives, standing between members and God. Members have no representation and no means of recourse. Unquestioning loyalty is expected to workers and all that the church stands for.

Discipline: Implemented in a graded manner starting with talks by workers or elders, threats and shunning of members seen as rebellious. Not unusual for communion or baptism to be withheld; or to take away offender's ability to take part in prayer and testimony. Meeting may be removed from an offender's home. The most extreme discipline is excommunication which is seen as tantamount to taking away someone's eternal salvation. This is less common today but occurs when members are seen to have breached matters of significant unwritten doctrine, such as challenging the teaching on exclusivism or in some areas, marrying outside the church.

Finances: No collections taken. Money is expected to be donated to workers after gospel meetings and at convention times. Friends who are wealthy and big supporters of the workers are suspected of gaining favourable treatment on account of their support. No accounting of how money is spent is made to the congregation, however, it has been stated by a previous overseer that the organisation is financially well off. The funds are controlled by a Trust Fund with the Trustees being three well regarded elders of the Church. The overseer is in charge of the Trustees and has the final say as to where the funds will be sent or spent. Once he makes that decision, the Trustees withdraw the funds and give him a bank draft for the amount required in various areas as requested by the overseer.

Some details of the financial arrangements in Victoria were provided [REDACTED] in a statement at the time when two children connected with the church suicided:

http://www.tellingthetruth.info/workers_later/jonesevan.php

<http://www.tellingthetruth.info/plogger/?level=picture&id=1279>

It is understood that all workers are required to hand any cash on hand to the head worker at each annual convention. Funds are redistributed with each worker given a small amount of cash for the next year. When entering the ministry, workers are required to liquidise all assets and pass to the overseeing worker or distribute amongst family members.

There is some financial assistance provided overseas to other "missionary fields", however the church does not provide any charitable assistance to other organisations.

Family Life

The workers and friends generally accept that the husband is the head of the household. There has traditionally been a gross inequality between the sexes, although this has changed significantly in recent times. Divorce is not considered acceptable within the group. In cases of domestic violence, the victim is sometimes encouraged to stay in the marriage by workers.

There is an emphasis on holiness teaching, and children are encouraged to develop a faith in the bible and to adhere to its standards. Children are also encouraged to have great respect for and trust in workers. Many children refer to male workers by their first name as "Uncle Fred (or whatever)".

Workers strongly discourage members from accessing professional counseling or family support services.

Workers have traditionally discouraged members from taking any matters to the law.

WHAT THEY BELIEVE

Doctrine: No doctrinal statement published. Profess that their doctrine is the Bible.

Authority: State they believe and follow only "the teachings of the New Testament."

God: There is only one God. God is God, the Father, the Creator.

Jesus: View Jesus as God's only son, who is today under the authority and position of His Father; but He is not God the Son. Believe Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; lived a perfect life; came to establish a ministry pattern (Matt. 10) to be followed universally ever after; was crucified, died and rose again bodily before ascending to Heaven. Members look for His second coming, but as in mainstream Christianity, views on this vary in detail.

Holy Spirit: A force or power emanating from God or Jesus to a church member ("child of God"); not generally viewed as God the Spirit.

Satan: A fallen angel engaged in an age-long struggle to deceive and seduce men to follow him rather than obey God. He is evil, a deceiver, a murderer, a liar, and has power only insofar as God allows.

Man: Created by God per Genesis account. Adolescents reach "the age of accountability," when they are responsible to God for their actions.

Ministry: Men and women, known as "workers", who follow Jesus' instructions to His disciples in Matt. 10:5-14, Mark 6, Luke 9. They leave their homes, give their possessions away and go from place to place preaching in pairs (two and two), unmarried, living with and taking meals from those willing to receive them. Workers don't ask for contributions, accept no salary, taking literally Jesus' command: "freely give as you have freely received" Matt. 10:8.

After Life: All people either receive eternal life in heaven or eternal punishment in hell, depending upon their allowance of God's work in their life while on earth.

Healing, Miracles, Speaking in Tongues, Casting out Demons: Viewed as divine signs used in the first century only to confirm and convince. Speaking in tongues is deemed to be speaking in foreign languages.

Church Sites: Congregation meets ONLY in homes for fellowship meetings, taking literally; "God dwells not in temples made with hands" Acts 7:48, 17:24. No restrictions placed on sites for their gospel meeting services. Strongly opposed to church buildings. An often used slogan indicates the emphasis placed their methods: "the ministers without a home, and the church in the home."

THE FOUNDER AND HISTORY

Important note: Until recently, the majority of friends and workers believed that they have no earthly founder and their church began "on the shores of Gallilee".

The sect is a little over 100 years old, and was started by William Irvine in Ireland in 1897. After Wm. Irvine was converted through Presbyterian evangelist, John McNeill, he undertook classes at John Anderson Bible College in Glasgow. He joined the Faith Mission as a preacher in 1895. Irvine and some others went on an experimental mission to Scotland in 1897, using Jesus' Matthew 10 instructions to the disciples as their guide; totally relying on God to meet their needs, without any prearranged financial support. Since this method worked (their needs were adequately met and several converts were added), they assumed that God had never withdrawn or changed these instructions.

Wm. Irvine left the Faith Mission and developed a separate faith ministry. George Walker, Jack Carroll, Ed Cooney and others joined him. They rapidly gained volunteers for their ministry who abandoned their homes and gave away their possessions. The first convention was held in Rathmolyon, Ireland, in 1903, after which the movement went worldwide with William Irvine, Irvine Weir and George Walker going to the United States.

Sometime around 1906, home churches were first established. Irvine believed he had been divinely appointed to bring the last message of Jesus to the world before the end of the age of grace in August, 1914. The other workers did not agree with what Wm Irvine considered a progressive revelation. A schism arose in 1914, and the majority of the sect's adherents followed the leading of the other leading workers (sometimes referred to as the 2x2s, The Testimony, The Truth), while a few remained loyal to Wm Irvine (sometimes referred to as the Message People, the Witnesses, Irvinites). Ed Cooney, the co-founder was excommunicated in 1928, and some of his loyal followers also left with him (sometimes referred to as the "Cooneyites"). None of these three groups that were originally founded by Wm Irvine take an official name for their belief system.