

OUR REPLIES TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

Issued by *World Services* on the Collective Behalf of
the Fellowship of Independent Missionary Communities
Commonly Referred to as *The Family*

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It has come to our attention that serious accusations of sexual misconduct involving children are being made against members of our fellowships, principally by some disaffected former members who are working in conjunction with various anti-cult organisations. In the absence of any medical or other tangible evidence to support these allegations, our adversaries have produced some rather extreme and outdated examples of literature published in the past by some in our former fellowships, maintaining that such literature accurately reflects the present lifestyle and practices of our membership. Nothing could be further from the truth. Therefore, we feel it necessary to confront and deal with this issue directly, in order to provide objective observers with an opportunity to hear all the facts regarding this matter, that they may then draw their own conclusions.

Our Policy Concerning Child Abuse

We reiterate that all the communities belonging to our fellowship, *The Family*, are unequivocally opposed to any and all forms of child abuse, whether it be physical, sexual, emotional, educational, psychological, or otherwise. We do not tolerate any form of abuse of children within our communities.

We consider, quite literally, that each and every child is a priceless gift from God, and we treat them as such. Our excellent care of children has been substantiated and documented by doctors and specialists in many countries who have psychologically and physiologically tested children from our fellowships, and have found that they are in excellent condition, both mentally and physically, and have a very good, natural, healthy, and socially acceptable attitude towards life and sex.

Anyone who is at all acquainted with us knows that we are a very family-oriented movement, and put a great emphasis on the proper rearing and educating of our children. We have published thousands of pages of material covering in exhaustive detail every aspect of prenatal care, natural childbirth, baby and child care, early education, mental, emotional, physical development, discipline, etc. We do not claim to be perfect, or that the members in all our communities around the world have never made mistakes, but we

do claim to genuinely love each child in our communities, and to continually strive to improve the quality of life for them by constantly upgrading the standard of care they receive.

We have also taken a very firm approach to ensure that no instance of abuse of minors occurs within our communities. Our members have all agreed that any sexual contact between an adult and anyone under the age of 21 is strictly forbidden. Any adult who breaks this rule has no place in our fellowship and must immediately leave, and will be excommunicated from any contact whatsoever with our worldwide fellowship. Any adult found guilty of committing a sexual act with a minor is automatically and completely excommunicated from any contact whatsoever with our worldwide fellowship. The same is true concerning physical child abuse. Any adult who physically abuses a child is immediately expelled from our fellowship. Similarly, any parent who through neglect (or in any other way) abuses his or her children is also asked to leave our fellowship if the problem recurs after a warning. We simply do not tolerate child abuse in any way, shape or form.

We emphasise that these rules and penalties have been agreed to by all of our membership, and are rigorously adhered to and enforced within all member communities. Leadership of a community do not hesitate to put out from among them anyone found guilty of such crimes. Our fellowships are not, and never have been, interested in keeping individuals within our ranks who are not willing to abide by the rules that we have all voluntarily agreed upon, rules which we believe are founded on standards of conduct that Christ gave His followers in the New Testament. Nowhere are the rules more strictly enforced than when the basic health and safety of these precious children are involved. Anyone whose actions or behaviour could be detrimental to our children has no place among us.

Questions and Concerns about Some of Our Previous Literature

With the above in mind, the uninformed observer may ask, "If your present policies and regulations concerning child abuse are so stringent, why did some of

your former fellowships previously publish articles that seem to suggest that you condoned or even promoted sexual contact between adults and minors?" We can understand that to some, an apparent discrepancy exists. We would therefore like to take this occasion to explain why such material was originally disseminated, what effect it had on some of our fellowships, and what steps we have since taken to ensure that all of our children grow up in a safe and secure environment. We offer this not as a justification, but rather as an explanation, with the purpose of refuting these false allegations once and for all.

"The Family of Love" Era and "FFing"

To have an accurate understanding why such literature was published, it is necessary to be familiar with some of our background and history. The period that seems to be most in question is that of the late 1970's and early 1980's, when many of our communities were known as The Family of Love. Almost all the literature cited by our accusers was published during that period.

At that time, our membership was mostly young, single adults, and still quite influenced by the somewhat radical, anti-establishment, free-wheeling hippie lifestyle and culture of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Just as those of us who are entering middle age can now look back on those days, and marvel at the degree to which many of the mores and values of society at large have changed, the present members of our fellowships similarly marvel at how much we have changed. Although our basic foundation and message of loving Jesus and His Word and preaching the Gospel has never changed,¹ many of our methods and certain aspects of our lifestyle have. Many of the things that we did then, we don't do any more, and in fact some of them we even totally forbid. Both as individuals and as a movement, we have significantly changed, progressed, matured and stabilised. So to truly understand us, it is of utmost importance to grasp this point, that The Family of 1992 is very different from The Family of Love of fourteen or even ten years ago.

In the early days of the Children of God (the former organisation from which 25% of our present members originated), sexual relations outside of marriage were virtually taboo. But many of us could not reconcile the established churches' teaching regarding love and sex outside marriage with our experience of deeply caring and loving relationships outside of marriage, whether sexually fulfilled or not. How could such relationships be regarded as sinful and morally wrong? Could true, sacrificial unselfish love really be contrary to the laws of God? In the mid 1970's, our founder, Father David, became convinced by Scripture that as truly "new creatures in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17), we could take the Scripture literally, that "to the

pure, all things are pure" (Titus 1:15), and that loving, sexual relations between consenting adults are not a sin in the eyes of God, as long as they are motivated by genuine unselfish love, and do not in any way hurt anyone else.

We believe the Scriptures to mean that if a Christian is motivated by unselfish love, then the Mosaic laws against adultery and fornication are not binding, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. For the fruit of the Spirit is love . . . against such, there is no law" (Galatians 5:14,22,23). (For a more detailed explanation, please read our Position and Policy Statement [April 1992]: "Attitudes, Conduct, Current Beliefs and Teachings Regarding Sex.")

Needless to say, such a revolutionary doctrine caused a nearly unbridgeable gap between these fellowships and the rest of mainstream Christianity, the vast majority of whom have a very difficult time believing that God made sex for our enjoyment and not solely for procreation. Thus, our interpreting the Scriptures to mean that loving sex between consenting adults, regardless of their marital status, is lawful in the eyes of God, horrified many with the more traditional religious disposition.

Taking this doctrine a step further, Father David showed us from the Scriptures that it would also be no sin in the eyes of God if a member were to voluntarily choose to have heterosexual relations with a non-member, providing the motivation was to sincerely try to demonstrate God's Love and care for them. This radical new method of intimate personal witnessing became known as "Flirty Fishing" (or "FFing"), a term derived from Christ's invitation to the fishermen of Galilee to "follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Because this new approach was so completely different from any other outreach ministry we or any other Christians had ever previously employed, it was dealt with extensively in many of our publications during that period.

"MO Letters" and Other Articles on a Wide Array of Sexual Themes

Many of Father David's Letters that discussed the possibility of combining sex with personal witnessing were intentionally written and illustrated in a very provocative manner. This has offended and shocked many non-members, and even a few Family members. We'd like to explain why he chose this approach.

First of all, Father David has written shocking and provocative Letters on many subjects, not just matters concerning sex. He has acknowledged on many occasions that he is by nature an iconoclast. When it comes to exposing the many unscriptural beliefs and traditions that entrench much of mainstream Christianity, he likes to shock people, hoping that they will wake up and look on these issues in a new light.

Father David has said, "I guess I like the shock treatment! I like to shock people, challenge them, stir them up, arouse them, awaken them out of their lethargy, even cause them to explode over something I've said, at least get them to do something to spur them into action one way or the other.—Make'm mad, sad or glad!" (MOP 109:16)² Such an approach is nothing new. Throughout Biblical and Church history, it seems that one of the main roles of the prophets and other great men of God, not to mention Jesus Himself, was to generally shake up the established religious order in order to reveal new truths and help believers live their lives in accordance with the Scriptures. (For a study on the subject, we suggest you read Father David's Letter, "Did God Make a Mistake?")

Secondly, Father David's audience at that time was largely composed of young, single, foot-loose, idealistic, radical drop-outs from the hippie culture of the 1960's and 1970's who had tried everything—drugs, sex, and Eastern religions, etc.—and found that nothing satisfied, until we accepted Jesus into our lives. Father David knew that with such a background, we would not relate to, nor be happy with run-of-the-mill traditional sermons on traditional subjects, but rather that we craved fiery, challenging, no-holds-barred preaching and teaching. He gave it to us, and we loved it!

Thirdly, the social climate of that period was quite different from today. Generally, it was quite permissive with more of an "anything goes" attitude. The "free love" sexual revolution of the 1960's had yet to exhaust itself, and the scourge of AIDS was still unknown. In a sense, people were more tolerant of new ideas and views concerning sexual mores. This was evidenced by favourable reactions we received from much of the general public when we distributed educational Letters on various sexual issues. Ideas that were considered almost mainstream in those days are often rejected today by a society that has basically become much more conservative in nature.

It was to this young and radical audience, and in this social climate of the 1970's, that Father David and others wrote many articles on a wide range of sex-related subjects. The reason for these articles, apart from advice on how to go about FFing to try to show God's Love, was to try to instill in us a good, healthy, godly attitude towards sex. Most of us had been taught by clergymen and teachers and raised by parents who imparted to us a generally negative attitude on the subject. Usually it was a topic that was never openly discussed, so the impression given was that it was something that must be bad, evil and shameful.

So Father David was attempting to show us that such attitudes were wrong, and that we would be far better off if we were more open and honest about sex. In many ways, the conclusions he came to were the same as those that numerous sociological studies have since arrived at: namely, that an open, honest, loving, healthy and natural sex life can benefit adults mental-

ly, physically, and spiritually. The enormous difference, of course, was that Father David was showing us that such attitudes were in fact godly, that God had created sex, and that it could be enjoyed without fear of Divine retribution!

His Letters from this period covered a wide range of sexual topics. For example, he addressed the issue of lesbianism. After initially feeling that some such relationships could be acceptable, because the Bible doesn't specifically forbid them, he ultimately concluded that such relationships were certainly far from the ideal, were unnatural and therefore should not be encouraged. Similarly, although personally very opposed to the practice, he attempted to take a charitable view of the problem some men have of being attracted to other men in a sexual manner, a very prevalent problem in today's world. Father David concluded that such men should seek help, ask for prayer, and look to God to deliver them from such unnatural desires, and that no homosexual activities whatsoever should be tolerated in our communities.

Other Letters were also written on the subject of what we should teach our children concerning sexual matters. On this point, he came to the conclusion, as have many other people the world over, that children should be taught that there is nothing inherently wrong with their bodies or their sexual feelings, and that matters concerning sex should be presented to children in as honest and straightforward a manner as possible, avoiding the guilt-ridden untrue explanations that so many of us were given when we were young. He generally felt that children should be encouraged to discuss sexual matters with their parents and that parents should not be embarrassed to discuss these matters openly with their children.

He also wrote a number of articles in which he discussed some of the more controversial areas of a child's sexuality. For example, he raised the question, since God made young teen girls and boys physically capable of having sexual relations, could it be possible that He originally intended for them to have sex at an early age?—And if so, was it against the laws of God if they did? He also questioned if it was inherently evil, wrong, harmful or abusive for a mother or nanny to put a young male child to sleep by fondling his penis, as was the custom in some primitive societies and cultures. He speculated as to whether the practice of a younger girl being married to an older man was intrinsically wrong—a custom which, by the way, has been quite common in some societies until only recently. He also broached the subject of whether each and every sexual contact between an adult and minor was in fact necessarily harmful.

Needless to say, all of these are extremely sensitive subjects, considered virtually taboo in the Western world today. It is primarily literature of this nature, which was written during this period, that has most offended people and is being used by our accusers to this day, though we have made it clear that any such prac-

tices are totally forbidden in our fellowships.

Printed Word Is Not Always Practised

At this point, we would like to highlight a few important points.

First of all, just because some idea is openly discussed in print within our movement, it does not in any way mean that it becomes, or is even intended to become, standard practice, or indeed is ever practised by any of our membership. Of course, articles that deal with urgent topics and timely considerations are expected to be read and adhered to, at least in principle, but many other articles are simply accounts of dreams, doctrinal discourses, experiences by individual missionaries, news commentaries, and practical tips and lessons, etc. We publish thousands of pages of literature every year on a wide variety of subjects, and it is almost impossible for any member of our fellowship, as busy as they usually are, to ever read it all, much less put it all into practice. Much of our present-day membership have read only a fraction of the thousands of Letters and articles written by Father David and others over the years. There simply isn't time or even the need to attempt to do so, since many of these earlier publications do not apply to present-day practices within our communities. Father David himself has frequently reminded us how quickly much of his counsel and comments become outdated in a rapidly changing movement such as ours, and that advice which might be relevant in one situation might not apply in another.³

We would also like to remind the reader that just because an individual has various publications in his possession, or at a community where he lives, it does not mean that the individual practises everything contained in them. For example, does the mere possession of a Bible by a Christian, who avows that it is the infallible Word of God, mean that they without reserve advocate every extreme act and statement described therein? Is a Bible-believing Christian obligated to follow Christ's command and pluck his right eye out and cast it from him, if he looks on a woman lustfully? (Matthew 5:28,29.) Or does it mean that if a child is disobedient to his parents, that they are obligated to stone him to death, as commanded by God in Deuteronomy 21:18-21? So do we accuse every Bible-believing Christian of endorsing such conduct? Of course not. Just so, simply because one of our fellowships may possess some old and outdated literature of a controversial nature does not mean that they wholeheartedly endorse every idea discussed, and it certainly does not mean that they practise them.

Secondly, contrary to the accusations of our enemies, we do not promote blind acceptance of every doctrine and idea that comes into print. Our membership appreciates and highly values Father David's Letters for the invaluable guidance, teaching, counsel, in-

struction and encouragement that they contain; however, they also realise that some are more or less theological speculations and personal opinions. Father David has been the first to encourage each of us to "search the Scriptures to see if these things be so" (Acts 17:11; John 5:39). He has constantly upheld the Bible, stating, "The Bible is still the yardstick of measurement, the bureau of standards by which we measure everything else God has ever given us. If it isn't confirmed and can't be corroborated by the Bible, if you can't prove it also by the Bible, and it's not in accordance with the Bible, you don't have to believe it!" (MOP 149:168.)

Father David has always promoted tolerance in areas of lesser importance. Coming from a denomination which, as he said, was more famous for the great men of God that they expelled for minor doctrinal disputes than anything else, he knows the dangers of dogmatic rigidity and intolerance. In warning against this, he wrote:

"It is not necessary that you or I or any of the rest of us see exactly eye to eye on every technical detail of theological hairsplitting, such as minor doctrines and interpretations and even MO Letters which are not essential to Salvation, soul-winning and world evangelism. It is only necessary that we agree on Salvation through Jesus, the basic authority of God's Word, our obligation to witness His Truth to others, to manifest His Love to the world and win the lost for Christ and His service as we see it. Although I and others may have our very decided opinions on other minor doctrines, principles, practices and interpretations which we are thoroughly convinced are Scriptural and true, we do not have to totally agree on all these to work together." (ML#193, par.12.)

So beyond the basic obligations and commitments that each member must fulfil, what they choose to put into practise or not practise is largely up to them and their personal faith. On these matters we have taken as our creed Jesus' admonition that, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matthew 9:29), and St. Paul's caution to "let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5).

So although a number of articles that were written several years ago could be construed as seeming to condone some rather questionable practices concerning underage minors and sex, such things never in any way became an official policy of either The Family of Love or our present-day movement, nor did the vast majority of our membership of that time ever have any sexual involvement with any minors whatsoever. They simply did not participate in any such activities. So regardless of past articles or publications that our accusers attempt to use as "evidence" that our communities systematically abused children, these articles did not at all reflect the actual conduct of our members at that time.—And they certainly have no bearing whatsoever on our present-day members and communities.

Lastly, we would like to underscore the fact that twelve or fourteen years ago, our publications received much less editorial scrutiny before they were printed and distributed to our membership than they do today. We sincerely regret having published any articles that could have affected our membership in negative ways. We have since learned to be much more careful and discerning about any articles that we publish, in order to ensure that they are not subject to misinterpretation.

The Effects of Articles on Some Communities

In the years following the dissolution of The Children of God in 1978, when most of this controversial literature was distributed, we had a very loose fellowship structure, with few common binding rules and no clearly defined code of conduct that all members had agreed to abide by. We also lacked a specific policy as to what to do about offenders. Each individual member usually operated according to his or her own interpretation and application of the various publications as they saw fit or believed to be correct; hence there was a great divergence of thought on many matters, including sex. Sad to say, during this time, it seems that certain members of a few fellowships may have taken a literal interpretation of some of the controversial ideas expressed concerning sex and children, and may have experimented in ways never intended, such as having some sort of sexual contact with underage teens.

However, we vehemently deny the accusations of our avowed enemies that underage minors were ever involved in the sexual witnessing activities of adult members. No children or teenagers were ever involved at all in the practice of FFing. Any such accusations are absolutely false.

While we may now regret that some speculative views were published in which the massaging or fondling of a young child by the mother or nanny, was discussed as a means of relaxing or putting that child to sleep, never was anything ever published which gave any license whatsoever to anyone to even think about using a child for selfish sexual gratification. In fact, any adult who would have looked on a child as an object for sexual gratification would have been viewed as a sick and perverted individual, and would have been urged to pray to God for a change of heart and attitude, and if a major change was not immediately forthcoming, they would have been expelled from our fellowship.

Sexual Contact with Minors Officially Forbidden

When rumours began to surface that some members were possibly having sexual contact with adoles-

cents, action was taken to clearly explain to all members that not only was such conduct not condoned, but strictly forbidden. In 1985, an internal memorandum was sent out to all members, emphasizing that any sexual contact between adults and underage minors was completely unacceptable in any of our fellowships. We quote this memorandum as follows:

"For the record, we want to say that we do not agree to adults having sexual contact with children. The Family should just not do it. Even though teen sex with adults may be tolerated in some countries, we are against it, as its fruit is more bad than good. Adults should refrain from any sexual involvement with all underage children and minors.

"Although Dad (Father David) has written about teens, and even younger children's sexual interests, these interests can be satisfied by a natural and open attitude with others their own age. Also, it should be emphasized to our teens and children that they need do nothing against their will. They can always say, 'No!'

"Young folks being affectionate with each other is natural and healthy, as long as they're not hurting each other; but let's keep it within the confines of their own age. Let's set the record straight here and now that youth with youth and teens with teens is the normal, natural type of loving affection that we, and even society, would expect."

(Since 1985, even the above quoted degree of liberality described above, regarding children and adolescents being sexually affectionate among themselves has been discouraged in our communities.)

From that point on (1985), any adult member found guilty of having any kind of sexual contact with a minor was excommunicated from our fellowships. A few did not take this edict seriously, and when discovered, were permanently expelled from our midst. Ironically, some of these very same people have since addressed the media, falsely testifying of sexual misconduct within our communities.

We Become More Family Oriented

Even before this 1985 memorandum was issued, we were seeing the need to de-emphasize sexual matters in our publications, our outreach, and our day-to-day life, in order to focus more on the care and education of the many children that were growing up in our communities.

Although in the past the adults in our communities had experimented with our God-given sexual freedom, now with growing families and greater responsibilities we began to concentrate more on the care of our children and our personal walk with the Lord. We had realised that sex was not inherently evil and could be enjoyed at the right time and in the right place. So we put it on the back burner, so to speak, so that we could devote more of our time and effort to the jobs that God had called us to: to preach the Gospel, to raise our

children, and to grow in spiritual maturity. So about this time there began a general tightening of membership requirements which continues today.

As early as 1983, Father David requested that we completely curtail sexual relationships between members of different communities within our fellowships.

In December 1984, World Services published a Letter from Father David's wife, Maria, to all of our fellowships, stating that no new adult member joining a community should be allowed to have any sexual contact with a regular member until after at least six months of full-time membership. This restriction was instituted so that they could concentrate on establishing a good spiritual foundation in their new life for Christ, without being distracted by romantic or sexual affairs.⁴ The fact that anyone caught breaking this rule was to be punished with complete excommunication from our fellowship illustrates the extent to which our sexual attitudes were shifting.

In May 1985, Father David even wrote a Letter entitled, "Be a Eunuch!", encouraging any members who did not care for sex to refrain from it entirely, and not feel badly in any way about taking such a stance.⁵

Beginning in 1986, we held a number of teen training seminars. Some of our enemies have accused us of using these camps as an occasion to train our teens to FF. Nothing could be further from the truth, evidenced by the fact that during these seminars, which frequently lasted from four to six weeks, all adult staff members voluntarily agreed to abstain from any sexual relations among themselves. This was to enable them to more fully devote themselves to their responsibilities of instilling solid, moral, Scriptural values into the teens in their care. And certainly, there was absolutely no sexual contact allowed among the teen attendees.

FFing Discontinued

By 1987, the practice of Flirty Fishing was being used less and less as a means of witnessing. In September of that year, all of our fellowships agreed that all forms of sexual intimacy in witnessing to non-members should be completely discontinued. This effectively marked the end of The Family of Love era and the end of sex having any role in the methods we use to promote the Gospel.

The official cessation of FFing was partly due to the fact that we were becoming increasingly aware of the deadly threat of AIDS. We had also been trying out new methods of witnessing and winning souls which were proving very fruitful, and so felt that it would be best to discontinue FFing in order to concentrate more on these.

Controversial Writings Renounced

In 1988, some of our enemies first made accusations against us of child abuse, citing as evidence the various articles that had been produced some years earlier. As it became clearer that these old writings were causing some outsiders to question our beliefs on this subject, we published an official statement entitled "Child Abuse!", in which Father David publicly stated:

"We do not approve of sex with minors, and hereby renounce any writings of anyone in our Family which may seem to do so! We absolutely forbid it!"—"CHILD ABUSE?!"—An Official Statement," 12/88

We subsequently realised that it was not enough to just agree upon strict rules regarding the conduct of our members, but that we also needed to remove any questionable publications from circulation, in order to avoid even the "appearance of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:22) With this in mind, each fellowship then started to sort through the many thousands of pages of literature, and destroy any that seemed offensive, or that would seem to condone any form of sexual contact with children.

The result is that today, the vast majority of the literature which our enemies now seek to use as "evidence" against us does not in fact exist in our fellowships. These copies that they produce are usually some of the last in existence, removed from our fellowships some years ago without permission, and now virtual collector's items, relics of a bygone era that certainly do not in any way reflect the practices or beliefs of our members today. The proof of this can perhaps best be attested to by the fact that we now have many full-time members who have been with us for five or six years, who have never even seen these articles, let alone witnessed any actions by any of our members which could be in any way construed as child abuse.

Further Warnings

Since this time, we have continued to educate our members as to the importance of limiting all physical contact with minors to expressions of affection that are strictly non-sexual in nature. A few months after Father David's statement was published in "Child Abuse?!"—An Official Statement," we issued a short internal memorandum, emphasizing to our members the importance of this statement as official policy, and that anyone found guilty of breaking it would be "automatically and immediately excommunicated—totally severed from receiving any literature, or from having any contact with the Family whatsoever!"

At about the same time, in June, 1989, Maria

wrote a short Letter to our worldwide membership entitled "Child Abuse: A Final Warning!" in which she spelled out her's and Father David's feelings on the subject. She wrote:

"There's absolutely no reason why anyone in the Family would have to go any further than normal, legal affection with a minor! You can show your children that you love them by doing what parents have legitimately done for hundreds and thousands of years; hugging them and kissing them and putting your arm around them.—You certainly don't have to have any kind of sex with them! There's no need or legitimate reason for it!

"It's been researched and proven by the experts that in almost every case where an adult got involved with a teen, the relationship failed simply because there are too many differences of interests. Young people have better experiences with other young people. Of course, a lot of young people don't have very good experiences with other young people, but it's been proven that the vast majority of those who tried it definitely didn't have very good experiences with adults! Teens who have had such involvement with adults have almost unanimously manifested a very negative, regretful or remorseful reaction to such experiences.

"We've already put out an urgent notice to the Family and to the whole world that we don't do such things, and we mean it, we don't do it!—And anybody who does is in serious trouble, not only with the world, but with us! So let me warn you again, if we or our leadership hear of any cases of this, and the cases are authenticated, it's going to result in automatic immediate excommunication of any such offenders!

"Let's all continue to love and nurture and train up our precious teens and young people in the Lord, and not have any such distracting, dangerous, damaging deviations within our ranks! For God's sake and our Family's sake and our witness to lost souls' sake, stick to the straight and narrow path of obedience to His commands and keep busy winning the world to Jesus! Amen? (Amen!—Father David.)"

In July of 1989, the Family attempted for the first time to codify some of our generally accepted rules. Sexual contact with minors was among those offenses officially listed as requiring automatic excommunication.

Maria's Admonition to "Flirty Teens"

A few months later, in October, 1989, Maria wrote another Letter entitled, "Flirty Little Teens Beware!", to both the adults and the teens in our fellowships, addressing a problem that exists in secular society, and had arisen on a smaller scale in a few of our communities. It concerned the deliberate flirting by teen girls in an attempt to curry the favour of male adults. We feel her Letter accurately reflects the current

climate that exists in our fellowships today. She wrote:

"While recognising the importance of giving our children affection, at the same time we must realise this is definitely not synonymous with sex! They don't have to have sex, they don't really need sex! In fact, having sex with them should be the farthest thing from you adult men's minds! Young teens like that need a father, not sex! And if you can't stop at normal fatherly affection, you'd better let someone else who can, display the affection.

"There are times when sex is not good! And you men just have to realise and be 'fully persuaded in your own minds' (Romans 14:5) that one time when it's definitely not good is when it involves a minor! We've already made that pretty clear by telling you you'll be excommunicated if you indulge in it!

"On the other hand, I think we really owe it to the men that we also make things very clear to you teen girls: 'Look, whatever you may think such flirty behaviour may get you—special favours or attention or privileges or whatever—you are toying with something that's really dangerous! You're playing with fire, and not only are you apt to get burned, but you could very well get this man into a lot of very serious trouble that could endanger or even completely destroy his fruitfulness for the Lord, and even his place in the Family!—It's that serious!'

"I'm not just talking about having sex, either! It's all of these flippant, vain, silly and flirty little things that the teen girls can do that lead into the big problems! Even if you men don't have sex with someone, you can still fall head-over-heels in love with them and go completely out of your mind over them! So even if you just give in to the preliminaries of it—spending hours together and reading together and holding hands, arms around each other, a little furtive kiss here and there, whatever—it's too much!

"You need to know that there are some definite rules and restrictions. In spite of the fact that we have a lot of freedom, we don't have freedom to destroy other people's freedom!

"You just have to stand up for what's right. You have to weigh the consequences and take a stand sometimes. If you see an adult and an underage teen flirting with each other, just stop them and say, 'That's improper behaviour and that's not good, it's not godly! It's not obedient and we can't let it go on.—Stop it!'"⁶

Present-Day Policies

In mid 1990, we took even further steps to protect our young people from any unnecessary sexual pressure. Our members agreed to forbid any sexual contact between adults and anyone under the age of 21, regardless of whether the age of legal consent is lower, as it actually is in many countries. This step was primarily taken to allow our older teens to grow into

adulthood free of the pressure of possible distractions of sexual or romantic liaisons with older adults.

We have also taken steps to provide our fellowships with an increased volume of educational material, drawn from many secular sources and written for all ages, which address the various aspects of sex education and child abuse.⁷

We believe that these policies clearly illustrate to any impartial observer that any accusations that our present-day communities in any way condone sexual contact between adults and minors are patently false. As you can see, we have in some ways become even more conservative in sexual matters than society at large.

As for the role that sex plays in our adults' lives, we can only say that it is very different from even five or six years ago, and in no way resembles the extremes our adversaries ascribe to us. While we believe that we still can enjoy a greater degree of sexual freedom between adults than most other Christian groups will officially permit, most of our adult members are now approaching middle age and sex plays a much less important role in their lives. By and large, anyone who would spend any time in one of our communities would be surprised to discover the very small part that sex plays in our members' lives. We are all simply too busy with more important responsibilities.

As far as our publications are concerned, they have become much more conservative, with very little emphasis given to sexual matters, and they certainly do not advocate or condone anything that is illegal. The material that we offer to the public has been generally welcomed by mainstream society for its uplifting social and spiritual value.

We hope that we have made clear to the reader how much we, both as individuals and as a new religious movement, have changed, matured and evolved over the years. We still have the same foundation, the Bible, as well as our belief in eternal Salvation, thanks to Christ's atonement on the cross. We have an intimate knowledge of God's undying love, and an unswerving desire to preach the Gospel to every nation. These principles have not changed. However, many of our outreach methods, as well as our lifestyle and some of our doctrines on less important subjects have radically changed. We therefore ask that our members, many of whom were not even part of our fellowships when the aforementioned controversial literature was published, not be judged on the basis of past articles which do not at all reflect our current practices or thinking.

Conclusion

As of mid 1992, this paper clearly reflects where we stand regarding the treatment of children in our communities. We acknowledge that some mistakes were made in the past, but we also believe that we

have done our best to correct them, and to put stringent measures in place to prevent them from happening again. We are confident that no evidence of any kind of sexual child abuse, or any abuse, for that matter, can be found in any of our fellowships. It simply does not exist.

Moreover, we are confident that the children in our fellowships are better protected from any possible abuse than the vast majority of children in society. They grow up in a loving environment, free of the horrific effects of alcohol, drug and nicotine abuse which destroys so many families today. They are mercifully spared having to endure verbal and physical violence, whether it be at home, at school, or on the street, not to mention the senseless violence portrayed in the media. Their sex education portrays sex as a loving, healthy act, rather than the subject of filthy jokes and perversions that many children wandering the streets or attending a public school are exposed to, not to mention the pornography that is so widely available. Our children know that they are special and unique, a literal gift from God, rather than an accident that should have been prevented by a condom or an abortion.

The children in our Homes are taught good, sane health habits, rather than developing an addiction for nutritionally deficient junk food. They can be assured of a high-quality practical education, instructed by people who consider it a privilege to teach them, and not just a job. But perhaps most important, they have the firm assurance that there is a God Who loves them in a personal way, and that their parents always care for and love them, have time for them and set them a good example. Children in the Family will never have to grow up alone and fearful, feeling no one understands them.

And so in closing, to those who actively oppose us, we say that we believe that you know in your hearts that your accusations against us are not true. We know that you are simply using these old pieces of defunct literature from the past in an attempt to further your own agenda, not for motives of improving the quality of care our children receive, but because you seek to destroy our Family as a religion and as a group, through defaming and smearing our present-day communities, many of which are full of members who have never seen these articles. We urge you, in the name of God, to desist from spreading your slanderous lies, and we remind you of the warning that Jesus Himself gave to those who sought to harm young Christian children, that "whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). We know that if you persist with these lies, God Himself is going to hold you personally responsible for any suffering that your witch hunts cause these precious children.

To anyone who may have been abused in any way

in the past by a member of one of our communities, we sincerely apologise. It was never our intent that anyone, especially children, should ever be hurt, and we hope that you are assured by the above-mentioned safeguards now in place, that today no abuses of children are tolerated in our fellowships.

And to those of you who sincerely seek to uncover evidence of systematic child abuse, we can only urge you to direct your gaze towards society at large where it exists on a massive scale, for it is there that child abuse is thriving. Consider the emotional, sexual, physical, and mental abuse that millions of children are exposed to daily, and ask yourselves if there isn't

enough for you to do there, in your own backyard, rather than unduly harassing our Christian communities where we have displayed the determination and resolve to eliminate both the problems and the problem-makers. We have successfully dealt with these issues. We now ask that our accusers do the same.

To those of you reading this who are sincerely and genuinely objective, if there is any doubt in your mind, we offer you the same invitation that Jesus once extended, "Come and see" (John 1:39). Come and visit us and see for yourselves that what we say is true.

FOOTNOTES

(All quotes are from Letters by Father David and Marla.)

1. Our unchanging foundation and message can be summed up by the following excerpts from "OUR MESSAGE", ML#330, Sep.1974:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.' If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us.' 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' (Ephesians 2:8,9; 1 John 1:9; Acts 16:31.)

"Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.' (Acts 1:8.)

"We also believe that all those who wish to be Jesus' disciples should: 'Go . . . into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.' 'Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in.' 'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor . . . and come follow Me.' (Mark 16:15; Luke 14:23; Matthew 19:21.)

"He that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.' 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.' 'Warn the wicked of his wicked way to save his life.' (Luke 14:33; Matthew 6:33; Ezekiel 3:18.)

"All that believed were together and had all things common.' 'And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and prayers.' 'And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.' (Acts 2:44; 2:42; 5:42.)

"So there's nothing new about our message—God's message through us! It's the same message Jesus preached, the same message His disciples preached; but they not only preached it—they also lived it, just like we're doing. That's the difference! The scribes and Pharisees were preaching it, but they weren't practising it!

"That's the difference between most of the churches and us. Jesus said to the common people, 'The scribes and the Pharisees (the religious leaders) sit in Moses' seat: All therefore they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do not ye after their works: for they say and do not.' And that goes for most of today's churches too!" (Matthew 23:3.)

"We will be a living ensamples of the Truth. We are preaching it in the greatest way of preaching it, by living it. Jesus' last prayer for His disciples was that 'they may be one . . . that the World may believe . . . and know that Thou [God] has sent Me.' (John 17:21) In other words, Jesus was saying that this unity with each other and God is the sample that will prove to the World the reality of His message."

2. See also the following:

"I'm an extremist and I exaggerate a little bit sometimes, I shock you!" (ML#1031:36, Jan.1976.)

"Maybe I'm a little bit extreme, but at least it kind of wakes people up, shocks'm and jars'm loose! Maybe it'll wake'm up and shake'm up and jar'm loose and shock'm enough to pull some of them halfway!" (ML#1562:42, July 1983.)

"I figure that if I shock you with the opposite extreme, it may wake you up enough to come at least halfway!" (MOP 109:8)

3. Excerpts from ML#127, Nov.1971: "When I make a suggestion for one Colony [community] that might work there, it doesn't necessarily mean it would work everywhere, under all conditions, so you've got to learn to make your own decisions, with the Lord's direct guidance, individually, for each Colony [community].

"We're trying to advise you from what we've learned from the Lord, and our own experience, but you don't necessarily have to do what we say. You can make your own decisions according to your own leadings from the Lord! You don't have to agree with me!" (ML#127:20,28)

4. Excerpts from "SEX FOR BABES?" ML#1909, Dec.1984: (The term "babes" does not mean minors but new adult members.—See 1 Peter 2:2.)

"New disciples have a lot of other things that they need to keep their mind on without being distracted by emotional and sexual involvements! If they get sexually involved then they're going to get emotionally involved, and it's going to take a lot of their time away from the Lord and the Word!

"I think that with new babes [new adult members—not minors!] it's a little too much for them to get involved in all kinds of relationships with all kinds of people. I think that maybe a four-to-six-month-period without sex for new babes [new adult members—not minors] might be a good idea. They need that time to get grounded in the Word and in our Family. They've got so much catching up to do and so much learning to do, that they don't need the distraction of extra relationships. They need to first work on their relationship with the Lord.

"Requiring a time of abstinence from sex also can help to show whether a disciple is dedicated and really coming into the

Family for the Lord and His Work, or just for sexual freedom! This will also ensure that we don't stumble them by giving them too much responsibility in having all the emotional and physical strain of a sexual relationship.

"Babes [new adult members—not minors!] should be happy that they don't have sex, so they can concentrate on getting strong and really learning what the Family's all about and learning to be good witnesses and good soldiers for the Lord! The less responsibility they have and the more single-minded they can be, the better. Our biggest responsibility is learning the Word, learning to be strong Christians and strong soldiers for the Lord! We're supposed to be an Army and learn strict obedience and dedication and yieldedness to the Lord and we're not supposed to have a lot of other distractions!

"We're an army and when babes [not minors!] join they need to go through their initial training and boot camp without the complications of personal relationships. They need time to fall in love with Jesus and the Word first, then later when they are stronger they can be trusted with the added blessing of sexual fellowship."

5. Excerpts from "BE A EUNUCH!" ML#1923, May 1985:

"There are some people who just aren't normally sexual or sexy so they ought to accept themselves the way they are, quit trying, just act natural, be themselves, quit trying to be somebody they aren't.

"Quit trying! Quit pushing it! Get interested in the Lord's Work and put your energies into something more profitable instead of just trying to be sexy when you don't feel sexy or trying to be something that you aren't. If you don't feel sexy, don't have sex!

"Ninety-eight per cent of life is not sex! So why not enjoy the 98% instead of letting 2% ruin all your enjoyment of life and all your pleasure? There are lots of other pleasures in the world besides sex! Not feeling sexy is not wrong! For goodness sakes!

"Some are eunuchs made so by man, Jesus Himself said, others are eunuchs just naturally. In other words, they're not naturally very sexy or sexual. He said others are eunuchs for the Lord's sake because they are too devoted to His Work and His Kingdom and working for the Lord and for others, therefore they simply forsake sex and don't worry about it. (Matthew 19:12) They fill up their time and strength with things far more profitable than sex! Sex is not the greatest thing in life!

"Serving the Lord is the greatest thing in life! Serving others is the greatest thing in life! Jesus said to love Him with all your heart and mind and strength and to love your neighbour as yourself, that those are the greatest things in life! (Matthew 22:37-39; 19:19) The Law of Love didn't even necessarily include sex. He [Jesus] never said anything about having to love sex!

"It is fairly normal and natural for most people to like sex, but there are some people who don't, and some people are in a sense made that way by the Lord, devoted to the Lord. Maybe God made them that way so they wouldn't be worrying about sex and could devote their time and energy to other things far more important than sex!

"If you can't make it, forget it! That's my advice. Quit trying! Quit struggling! Be happy! Do something else you can do and be satisfied in. There are thousands of things you can do and be successful in and have a great deal of satisfaction and fulfillment in without trying to work so hard on one or two per cent of life where you can't make it!

"If you can't make it, forget it! For Christ's sake, be a eunuch! Quit struggling and be happy! Get busy serving the Lord and others!"

6. Excerpts from "FLIRTY LITTLE TEENS, BEWARE!" ML#2590, Oct. 1989:

"Some teen girls play on the sexual angle to try to get the men's attention. That's all that a lot of them want, attention, but it can easily be misinterpreted by the men as meaning something else. So you men just need to take a definite stand in your own hearts and minds that you're not going to be swayed by anything that some young teen girl may do to interest or even entice you.

"There's nothing wrong with fighting against giving in to sexual desires if in some particular situation they're wrong. Let's face it, sex is not something that's always good, clear across the board. Just because we promote sex and we believe God made it and that it's His wonderful creation doesn't mean that it's always good under every circumstance! 'All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient or edifying!'—1 Corinthians 10:23.

"So this is a very needed and important message to both you teens and adults, that you need to try to restrain yourselves.—Not just try, you definitely must restrain yourselves! And you adults who have such a great problem with it that you don't think you can refrain will just have to ask for help so that you don't find yourselves in the kind of situation that tempts you above that you're able to bear. You're just going to have to learn to bring your body into subjection.—1 Corinthians 9:27.

"It's possible! The Lord says you can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth you.—Philippians 4:13. Jesus said all things are possible, and when you're weak then you're strong, for His strength is made perfect in your weakness.—Mark 9:23; 2 Corinthians 12:9. So it can be done! And you are just going to have to do it."

7. See Home Educator 1:5; "Safe Children". Also, All About Growing Up and Answers, both published by the Family Counselling Association, Manila. Also, "Children, Obey Your Parents", KIDz 74, Page 7.