



**Opinions, responses, and views by current second-generation members of the Family International (formerly known as the Children of God)**

**7/31/2008**

**The Family International's response to the July 31st Larry King Live Show (CNN)**

In Response to the CNN Larry King Live Show

From Claire Borowik for the Family International - July 30, 2008 (updated August 1st)

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It's a sad day for serious journalism when a program with the standing of Larry King Live produces a sensationalistic segment focused on the claims of a handful of apostates of the Family International and anti-religious lobbyists. Over its 40-year history, over 35,000 people have been members of our fellowship. The detractors featured on this program are not representative of the thousands of former members who have at one time served as missionaries with our movement.

The usage of the label "cult" in reference to the Family is particularly pejorative. Such labeling is an age-old tactic—Jesus and his followers were also maligned as the "cult of the Nazarenes" in their day. The Family International, founded in the late 1960s, has expanded into an international missionary fellowship located in over 100 countries around the world, that has led millions to faith in Christ, and has assisted the needy in a multitude of volunteer and humanitarian efforts (see <http://www.thefamilyinternational.org>).

Producers' claims that the Family International never responded to their invitation to participate on the program or to submit a statement are false. I submitted a statement on three occasions to the producers, in fact to seven different producers, as well as communicating on a number of occasions with the program coordinator, Rosy Stefanatos ([Rosy.Stefanatos@turner.com](mailto:Rosy.Stefanatos@turner.com)). She did not acknowledge my statement, or my phone calls, or e-mails (e-mail correspondence available upon request). For this reason, I opted to post our response on our public site. I find it quite disillusioning that this program would ignore the Family's right of response, and it raises a question as to why the producers would not inform Larry King of our communications. It seems clear that the intent was to demonize my fellowship with a completely one-sided, biased program.

### **Family Policy for the Protection of Minors**

The Family International has a zero tolerance policy in regards to the abuse of minors. The Family will immediately expel and excommunicate any adult member deemed guilty of physically or sexually abusive behavior towards children. Family members are advised to conduct themselves in conformance with the laws of the jurisdiction in which they live and to cooperate with the justice system of the land.

Allegations of abuse are taken very seriously by Family leadership, which has the obligation under the Family's *Charter* to investigate such reports in a timely fashion and to take appropriate measures ("Procedures for Excommunicating Family Members," *The Family Charter*). The *Charter* stipulates that the parents and the members of the community are responsible to provide a safe environment for all minors residing in their community. Parents are ultimately responsible for all decisions pertaining to the care and well-being of their children ("Rights of Children and Responsibilities of Parents," *The Family Charter*).

The Family's policy for the protection of minors was adopted in 1986. We regret that prior to the adoption of this policy, cases occurred where minors were exposed to sexually inappropriate behavior between 1978 and 1986. This was addressed in 1986 when any sexual contact between an adult and minor was officially banned and, subsequently in 1989 declared an excommunicable offense. This policy has remained unchanged for nearly two decades, and the Family's *Charter* (first published in 1995) reaffirms this standard.

All previously published literature underwent careful scrutiny to ensure that it reflected this position, and questionable publications were officially renounced and expunged between the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1994, official acknowledgement was made of the responsibility David Berg bears in publishing writings that proclaimed a teaching of sexual liberty (in 1976 and 1978) without instituting safeguards for the protection of minors. This was officially corrected in 1986, when clear guidelines were instituted banning any such contact and subsequently in 1989, when infractions of this policy were rendered an excommunicable offense.

The successful institutionalization of this policy is evidenced in the 600+ children of Family members that were subjected to government-enforced examinations in the early 1990s in several countries. These examinations confirmed the absence of physical, emotional, educational, or sexual abuse among children of Family members, resulting in the vindication of members by courts of law on three continents.

### **Official Apologies Tendered**

Since 1993, the Family's administrative branch has issued eight official apologies to former and current Family members for any grievances regarding their experiences in the Family. Family leadership officially addressed therein any questionable past actions regarding discipline, education, or sexual misconduct that may have taken place. These apologies were published a number of times and have been a matter of public record for the past decade.

Our sincere hope for those who were once part of the Family is that they can lead constructive, fulfilling lives and progress in the new goals they set for themselves once they decide they no longer wish to make serving the Lord with the Family their career. Our prayer is for reconciliation and mutual respect in the path that each one has chosen.

of his or her own free will.

Although the Family has apologized on a number of occasions to former members for any hurt, real or perceived, that they may have suffered during their time in our membership, we do not give credence to tales of institutionalized abuse told by those who seek to cause harm to our church and children. There is no basis in fact for such allegations, as evidenced by the findings of courts around the world, which evaluated over 600 children living in Family communities by means of extensive court-appointed physical, psychological, and educational testing. In every case, the courts have been satisfied with the standard of life offered to the children. (For summaries of court rulings see [http://www.cesnur.org/testi/TheFamily/se\\_thefamily.htm](http://www.cesnur.org/testi/TheFamily/se_thefamily.htm).)

### **Incidence of Suicide amongst former members**

There is no factual basis to claims of Family detractors that a high incidence of suicide exists amongst former second generation members. We find it very grievous that even one former member would succumb to suicide, however, the claim that nearly 30 suicides occurred in the past 15 years has no basis in fact or official causes of death. According to available records, the rate of incidence of suicide amongst the approximately 32,000 former members of the Family is far below the average in general, and in conformance to the expected rate in some age ranges.

We acknowledge that those who were once a part of our movement are as likely to succumb to social illnesses as the population at large. The World Health Organization estimates that suicide is responsible for a global mortality rate of 16 per 100,000 people per year. In the last 45 years, suicide rates have increased by 60% worldwide, rendering it among the three leading causes of death among those aged 15-44. In a period of history where the rates of suicide are rising at an alarming rate, suicide and acts of violence are virtually unknown in the Family International.

### ***Not Without My Sister*, by Juliana Buhring and Celeste Jones**

Juliana Buhring's dramatic tales and escape narrative have no basis in fact, and she was actually assisted by Family members in her transition from the Family International, and departed on good terms. Celeste Jones' account is likewise riddled with distortions and inaccuracies, to the point that it's difficult to discern fact from fiction in this book. Juliana and Celeste are clearly benefiting from the publicity afforded them by programs such as this to make a name for themselves and to sell books.

### **Stephen Kent**

It's surprising that the producers of the Larry King Live Show would invite two people from the academic field that are of the infinitesimal minority of scholars that are active in anti-religious campaigns. Many scholars have researched, studied, and published their research on the Family International in recent years, unlike Kent, and yet none of these were contacted for this show. It's clear that the scope of this program was narrowed to people antagonistic to minority religions. Kent's only source of information on the Family is hostile ex-members. His allegations are false, and have no foundation in fact.

Approximately half the young adults born in the Family continue to be members of the movement. They tell a very different story than the tales of the detractors featured on this program, and have published a blog in response to such allegations, to ensure that their voices will be heard. Over 400 young people raised in the Family have posted statements and testimonials with photos. (Please see <http://www.myconclusion.com>.)

It seems we never learn from history, and despite the trauma that hundreds of Family children suffered in the early 1990s due to unfounded allegations such as those presented on this show (and disproved by the courts), the witch hunt continues.

*The Family International, formerly known as the Children of God, is a fellowship of Christian missionaries dedicated to preaching the Gospel around the world. Members have received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and live and work together in small communities. Founded by David Brandt Berg (1919-1994) in Southern California, the Family has expanded into an international missionary fellowship located in over 100 countries around the world. Approximately two-thirds of the Family's full-time membership is comprised of second and third generation members. (For more information, please see <http://www.thefamilyinternational.org>.)*

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The authors of some letters chose to use initials or aliases, as they live in locations where publicizing their legal names could put their Christian missionary work at risk.

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