

Dear Community Member

**Grace Gospel Church/Church Team Ministries International**

In a letter dated 29 January 2009 I raised the concerns I had about Grace Gospel Church (GGC) and its parent body, Church Team Ministries International (CTMI). This letter was widely circulated and reinforced similar concerns previously highlighted by Church leaders in the Highway area and several individuals. In the last two months I have continued to meet with people whose lives and family lives have been negatively affected by GGC/CTMI. These meetings have provided an even clearer picture of how individuals are drawn into this church, indoctrinated and isolated from their families, friends and careers. The observations listed below will, I hope, continue to raise awareness about this group and may enable an early and successful intervention in the lives of people influenced by GGC/CTMI.

**Behavioural Changes**

One of the first signs of behavioural change is a marked self-isolation from previously held friendships and social groups. This isolation may be rapid (1 week) or gradual (several months) and will include even long standing friendships and best friends. Anchoring this isolation is an understanding that such relationships are “carnal”; of “the flesh” and are to be willingly sacrificed in favour of “spiritual” relationships, by which is meant association with members of GGC/CTMI. By most theological standards this understanding is distorted and promotes a false dichotomy between the believer and the world.

However, this flesh-spirit tension is used even more powerfully to create an unnatural emotional modulation in CCG/CTMI adherents by claiming that normal emotions such as sorrow, anguish, anger, grief or hurt are “of the flesh” - that is, fruit of fallen human nature. This creates a situation where the natural emotions raised precisely by the individual’s growing separation from family, friends and normal life are minimised or dismissed instead of being seen as warnings. Individuals spend great effort repressing these emotions which leads to the characteristic “robotic” and inappropriate emotional responses to life. Thus emotionally injured, the adherent will exhibit a callous or superior indifference to the suffering their actions are causing loved ones.

CCG/CTMI ensure that adherents are blanketed with attention and love, and are kept busy attending meetings. The affection and attention powerfully draws those who have had a deficit of this in their lives and reinforces the “superiority” of the spiritual over the biological family. In even the most loving families it is impossible to lavish the amount of attention and care on an individual that GGC/CTMI do, which is an indictment rather of the sincerity of the church than the average family. It is not uncommon for adherents to receive in excess of 40 sms’s per day from members of CCG/CTMI encouraging their separation from their former life and their attachment to the church. At least 4 meetings are held during the week where the focus is repetitive worship and sharing of personal testimonies. Thus, a characteristic behavioural change is a growing focus on the people, life and work of CCG/CTMI to the exclusion of former interests and responsibilities.

Adherents soon adopt the discourse of the group. Speech becomes peppered with clichés such as the following:

*Given life; the Heart – Follow your heart; In the Spirit; In the Natural or Flesh; That's emotional; Confronted; Anointed; Take up a position; Putting law; Well with Jesus; Speak into my life; Love you guys; Free in Christ; Shared the pure gospel; Identify with the cross.*

Most of this language is copied from the discourse of Audrey and Mikki Hardy. Further changes in discourse include stilted syntax where people attempt to talk in the style of St Paul's writings and/or parrot phrases drawn from sermons.

Any objection to these behavioural changes is immediately seized upon as a form of persecution. A common theme from the pulpit of the group is that any challenge to their "new life" should be interpreted as worldly, if not satanic, persecution. An unhealthy paranoia is thus encouraged.

### **Doctrines and Indoctrination**

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of GGC/CTMI is their claim to a unique and superior understanding of Christianity. They see no hubris in believing that they are a more pure, more faithful group of believers than any other Christian church or group, historic or contemporary. This further encourages a "us" versus "them" dichotomy and its associated paranoia.

The place and authority of Scripture at CCG/CTMI is of interest. While the Bible is spoken of highly, it is used highly selectively and sporadically. There are devotional "meetings" where the Bible is not opened and frequently preaching is not tied to Biblical texts. Deep and systematic study of the Bible is resisted and even regarded with suspicion. **(The "heart" favoured way above the intellect and mind. Often quote "knowledge puffs up")** The group relies on a handful of stock Biblical passages that are persistently alluded to. They include Matthew 10:34ff, Matthew 12:46ff, Matthew 16:24ff and parallel passages.

The passages concerning the cost of discipleship are key. A powerful but skewed theology of the cross emerges here which promotes the notion that the adherent needs to respond to Christ with a "given life". The "given life" is strongly implied to be one where one gives up or at least marginalises one's "carnal" life including family and friends in favour of a spiritual family. Hereafter, the "given life" involves going to Mauritius to live and learn from other "given" lives and help build the new church at Trianon.

The over-emphasis on a few texts forms part of the process of indoctrination – repetition wears down critical faculties. Furthermore, the over-emphasis distorts Christian principles to a degree that is theologically and psychologically unhealthy.

A distinctive practice of GGC/CTMI involves the trumping of Biblical authority by personal authority. There is much talk of "anointing" and "special revelation" of preachers and leaders such as Basil O'Connel-Jones and Mikki Hardy. Their interpretation of Scripture and God's will supersede any other interpretation.

Adherents submit thoroughly to the authority of these leaders to the extent of putting the leader's opinions, needs and preferences above their own or those of their families. Of particular concern is the fact that GGC/CTMI leaders significantly influence "romantic relationships" i.e. who one should **or should not** be in a relationship with and who one can **and should not** marry. There is also evidence of leaders significantly influencing adherents to close businesses in favour of moving to Mauritius, and influencing dependent children to leave home to live with GGC/CTMI "family".

GGC/CTMI have displayed a disregard for the sanctity and authority of the family unit and justify their undermining of family relationships by quoting passages of Scripture such as Matthew 10:34-37 and Matthew 12:46-50. To draw the inference that these passages justify the type of damage done to families by GGC/CTMI is to grossly misread Scripture and to harm the witness of the Christian Church.

Whether it is consciously planned or not the type of indoctrination mentioned above serves to undermine all other authority – whether that is Biblical, parental, clerical or medical and entrenches the authority of the leaders of GGC/CTMI .

Much emphasis is placed on an inner experience of God speaking directly to the individual, and of the individual's heart convincing and convicting them of the rightness of actions or ideas. It is obviously impossible to argue against such subjectivism, and as a result GGC/CTMI leaders and adherents retreat to this defensive position when challenged. There is no consideration given to the possibility that one's "heart" might be deceived.

### **Possible preventions and interventions**

The adage that prevention is better than cure applies. The greater the degree of indoctrination the more difficult it will be for the adherent to accept any viewpoint except that of the GGC/CTMI leadership. Below are some issues to consider and suggested responses if someone you know becomes ensnared in this group.

Young people are more susceptible to the group's teachings on exclusivity and purpose, and the intense "caring" that is offered. GGC/CTMI fulfil the psychological need to belong by providing a group that appears more understanding and caring than the biological family. The group offers a simplistic dualistic worldview (us vs. them, good vs. evil) that is attractive to young people struggling to make sense of life. Their exclusivity and claim of a special relationship with God satisfies self-esteem needs which are often unfulfilled in early adulthood, and their mission work supplies a noble sense of purpose.

It is thus important for family issues to be speedily and lovingly resolved and sufficient attention and love be given to young adults by their family to avoid a hunger that would be met in this type of group. Groups like GGC/CTMI hold particular attraction for young people who have experienced an absent father. (I can see that this would be a preventative strategy but do we want to give impression that GGC youth are from dysfunctional families?)

Parents have a responsibility to provide a safe and loving environment wherein which values, morals and dreams can be discussed and explored. It is also part of parental

responsibility to provide guidance about spirituality and spiritual growth. Leaving the young person to make up their own mind about complex moral and theological issues requires them to have more wisdom than is possible for their stage of life. At very least, the family should immediately investigate a young person's attendance of any activity related to an unfamiliar religious group or church. It is useful to attend services or meetings with the young person to obtain an informed opinion. Gather information about the church group from the Internet and other local churches. If such information gathering causes alarm, it is important to continuously but non-confrontationally offer an alternative view of reality and faith, *while parental authority still remains*. e.g.. Acknowledge the church's good points but also draw attention to the fact that a small church is unlikely to have a better understanding of faith than other churches which have been around since Christianity began. It can also be useful to arrange a meeting with a trusted member of the clergy or professional counsellor. What is sought here is for internal dissonance to grow in the adherent and prevent further indoctrination.

Prayer is always important.

If someone becomes more indoctrinated than this, it will be necessary to consider professional assistance and becoming part of a supportive group. I can assist if these are avenues you wish to explore.

Yours sincerely