

Joe Anderson wrote this letter when he resigned as an elder. The letter was used as a basis to disfellowship him approximately eight weeks later.

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses
Service Department
2821 Route 22
Patterson, NY 12563-2237

June 5, 2002

Re: Letter of resignation

Dear Brothers,

This letter pertains to my wish to no longer serve as an elder in the Manchester, Tennessee Congregation. Knowing what I do about our organization's child molestation problem and other matters here in the Manchester Congregation, I find it difficult to keep serving as an elder. Undoubtedly, how we as elders handle allegations of molestation in our organization has troubled me for quite some time.

I was pleased to note from J. R. Brown's February 7, 2002 letter to Dateline NBC that our organization would hear views and opinions from individuals within the framework of the congregation, so I take this time to ask that you resolve some of my differences of opinion according to Scriptural principals.

Since I have been in close proximity to the child molestation issue because of my wife Barbara, I have come to know of hundreds of molestation cases mismanaged by elders. Without a doubt, many elders are incapable of correctly dealing with molestation allegations, but others followed verbal and written directions from headquarters that caused immeasurable sorrow and lifelong unhappiness to the victims and their families. Almost every day for the last several years, I've read accounts sent to my wife from victims describing their disagreeable encounters with elders and the Society, which, in effect, has punished them and protected their molesters. I know that Jehovah's Witnesses as a whole, plus those outside of our organization say that they hate child molesters even more than murderers, but whether they really do or not is shown by their feelings and actions.

Inasmuch as child molestation is an act done in secret, and since we the elders and the Society compound this by keeping such acts committed within our group a secret, the Witnesses are under the illusion that our organization doesn't have a problem with molestation. Of course, each elder knows if there are any accused or confessed molesters within his congregation, but elders don't know if there are molesters in other congregations. Consequently, because elders are unable to gage the scope of this situation because of the secrecy, most think there isn't a problem. Now, due to media coverage of many distressing cases of molestation within our organization, many elders are very disturbed. Without question, I'm sure that you are also.

Here's one example of why keeping molestation a secret from the congregation does not work: I'm personally acquainted with a woman who was divorced, and when her little girl was molested she went straight to the elders. They did not report the accused to the police, although Tennessee requires ministers to report child abuse. It took a sister in the congregation, who found out about the rape years later, to go to the police. This resulted in the molester being sentenced to eight years in prison. As far as I know, this man was previously accused of molesting three girls in another state and when he moved to Tennessee, the elders were notified of his past, yet they warned no one in the congregation as per the Society's instructions. Before he was arrested, he molested two girls in Tennessee. So who was right? The sister who reported him or the elders who kept the secret? In our congregation, one elder told the other elders

that if anyone molested his child, he would call the police first and elders later. Are you aware of how many elders feel this way? I personally know that many elders feel that they really can do nothing to help in these cases. Yet you instruct that an accusation of molestation within the congregation be reported first to the elders.

The October 8, 1993 Awake! states that child molesters want something else from their victims- "SILENCE." Are we not sharers in guilt with the molester when we don't **encourage** victims to go to the authorities where they will get help? Wouldn't this be the Christian thing to do? Are we not sharers in guilt with a molester, who silences the victim with threats, when we silence members in the congregation with threats if they warn others? In the May 24, 2002 letter to all the congregations in the United States, you stated that ".even one abused child is one too many." This same letter says, "At least since 1981, articles have been published in our journals, with a view to **educating** Jehovah's people on the need to protect children from child abuse." How can you educate Jehovah's people by keeping such secrets? To be able to protect their children, Jehovah's Witnesses have a right to know as part of their education if there are any people within the congregation accused of molestation.

Incidentally, it seems to me that if concerned people had not gone to the media about the child abuse problems in our organization, this subject would not have been addressed at the elder's school last year. It was obvious that there was a change of attitude by the statement made that "Child abuse is a crime." Now elders no longer treat molestation as a sin like adultery or fornication, but as something far more serious, a crime. This was a welcome change.

Recently, a woman who used to be a Witness told me, after she read an article in our local newspaper about Jehovah's Witnesses and allegations of child abuse, that she was molested by someone who attended the Manchester Congregation many years ago. I've known her family for over twenty-five years and remembered her as a young girl. The man she accused is a very good friend of mine for over thirty years. If I go to my friend with another elder confronting him and he denies the allegation, I'm in a dilemma because I want him not to be guilty. How can I provide justice when I'm partial? Of course, I could remove myself from this situation, but why should we even be put in a position to judge our brothers in such matters where it takes the wisdom of Solomon to sort it out. According to the October 8, 1993 Awake! it is improbable that a child who accuses a person of molestation is lying. However, I believe it is better to err in behalf of a child than the accused. But the question arises, why are we as elders even investigating this crime of child abuse? Can we as elders really identify a person as a molester when an accusation is made?

Of course, something has to be done when accusations are made but can't be proved, but most Witnesses want to leave situations like this in Jehovah's hands. To me this is shifting responsibility. Our organization has guides to settle disputes and discover truth, but in the above case, if the accused denied the allegation, the investigation is over until someone else comes forward accusing the same person (something that happens infrequently). Since elders have been told that molestation is a crime, why can't our brothers go first to the authorities with an accusation and then inform the elders. We expect our brothers to go first to the authorities with an accusation of murder. Moreover, it is inconceivable to think elders would investigate an allegation of murder to determine guilt or innocence, so why would we investigate an allegation of child abuse to determine guilt or innocence? This is just not our field of expertise. We are ministers of God, not police. The authorities and their child abuse experts sometimes make mistakes, but nothing like the mistake of just asking the accused "Did you do it?" and the reply is "No." If there is not another witness to the act, consequently, all charges are dropped, the matter is closed, and the victim is warned not to talk about it or else.

This brings me to the subject of victims having to provide another witness to his/her molestation. There are contradictions associated with this rule. In the past, Watchtower literature stated that two witnesses to

each act must be provided before judicial action could be taken. Now there's something new: ".two persons as witnesses to separate incidents of the same kind of wrongdoing can be deemed sufficient to take action." Which is it? Also, just what kind of action is to be taken? Judicial action which could lead to disfellowshipping? Or investigative action leading to the determination of guilt and then reporting the allegation to the authorities? If our teachings mean we must meet the above criteria before we report to the authorities, as many elders think we do, I say, "NO!" We shouldn't invoke the two-witness rule when it comes to whether elders should report an accusation to authorities. In fact, let me reiterate, I believe that elders should not be investigating an accusation of child abuse before the authorities are called in.

The flock is told that elders are loving, kind and sensitive. Yet, time and again, I have heard of extremely ignorant or worst behavior on the part of elders when involved in sexual abuse cases. For instance, a child in our circuit accused her grandfather of molestation. Her mother went to the police and the man (a brother) admitted his guilt. I was told that the case was handled satisfactorily by all concerned except when the mother was approached by the presiding overseer of the congregation and he said, "If it's any consolation to you, your daughter enjoyed the act!" The mother left the organization because she couldn't handle the idea that this man was her spiritual shepherd!

Another case comes to mind: A sister told of being molested when she was eight years old. The man confessed, but one of the elders asked her then, "What kind of clothes were you wearing?" She was advised to make peace with the perpetrator, and her family was counseled to invite him over for a meal. It's obvious that a question and advice like this proves that elders are not qualified and shouldn't be involved. If I know of hundreds of cases like these, you must know of thousands.

Children and women are very vulnerable in this male-dominated world, and this is true also in our organization. I have quoted James 1:27 many, many times and have heard it quoted from the platform an equal number of times. Of course, you well know this scripture where James said, "The form of worship that is clean and undefiled from the standpoint of our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their tribulation, and to keep oneself with out spot from the world." Generally, we emphasized the end of this scripture and rarely analyzed the situation orphans and widows found themselves in when the husband and father died. Primarily they were without a protector, which made them extremely vulnerable. Although the situation has changed somewhat today, there still are many areas where orphans and widows need help and elders should give special care to their needs. And especially is this so with regard to those who are sexually abused. Who are their protectors, if not those who can be likened to spiritual fathers-the elders. God puts them under our care and yours too. Whatever it takes, we should go the extra mile to help abused ones. However, it appears that our organization will sacrifice a child to keep the person who denies an allegation of molestation.

In your letter to All Bodies of Elders, February 15, 2002, you instruct us to, "Never suggest to anyone that they should not report an allegation of child abuse to the police or other authorities." Why should elders be put in a position to suggest or not to suggest reporting an allegation? The victim or caregivers and the rest of Jehovah's Witnesses should be informed by elders to always call the police if a crime has occurred, no buts or ifs about it.

Also, in this same February 15, 2002 letter, you say, "If you are asked, make it clear that whether to report the matter to the authorities or not is a personal decision for each individual to make." This is inaccurate information and illegal in seventeen states. In these seventeen reporting states, everybody is obligated to report even suspicion of child abuse. In Tennessee this has been the law since 1972. In Kentucky the law is the same. And why would Kentucky resident, Bill Bowen, as seen on Dateline, be told by someone in the Legal Department to not report a case of molestation? What is the Society's Legal Department doing giving us wrong information such as the above?

In the January 1, 1997 Watchtower, a policy statement is found that a man **known** to have been a molester can not hold a position of authority within the congregation. This policy is certainly appreciated and shows your concern for protecting the flock. However, the word "known" appears to be a confusing problem. Who is he "known" to, the elders-is the determination of his guilt or innocence in their hands? What if the victim can't prove to the elders that he/she was molested because of being unable to produce another witness to the act does this mean the accused remains in his position? I believe this is so because he is then "known" or considered by the elders to be not guilty. (He is then not "known" to be a molester.) Elders should never be given the power to determine who is to be a "known" molester or not because they are untrained and unqualified. This policy puts children in the congregation at risk and should be reevaluated.

In your statement in the May 24, 2002 letter to all congregations you say, "We have long instructed elders to report allegations of child abuse to the authorities **where it is required by law to do so.**" Where God is concerned, if this is a crime, it's a crime everywhere. If wrong in one state, why not in others? Also, if it's wrong we should do the right thing whether the laws of the land require it or not. Aren't we supposed to be morally better than the world? Do we not go an extra step or two because of conscience? Another point taken from the same statement as quoted above is this: You say, "We have long instructed elders to report allegations of child abuse to the authorities." Where is it written as policy that elders are instructed to report allegations of child abuse to the authorities? Your statement as quoted above is a half-truth and misleads the reader. What is not understood is that elders have written instructions to **call the Legal Department** where they will be told that if their state requires a minister to report the allegation, they should report it. That's a far different matter than ".long instructed elders to report allegations of child abuse to the authorities."

Another point I want to discuss with you is the recent disfellowshipping of my wife, Barbara. The scriptures used for disfellowshipping her are found in 1 Corinthians 5:1-12. The letter from L. Seely, presiding overseer of the Manchester Congregation, said that Barbara was disfellowshipped for causing divisions, not for committing any of the wicked acts Paul described in 1 Corinthians 5:1-12, i.e., gross wickedness, sexual immorality, etc. It was the Society's spokesman, J. R. Brown, who accused my wife of committing some unspecified "spiritual violations" or "sins" for which she was being called before a judicial committee. This most certainly blemished my wife's character before the whole world, especially since no proof was offered then or ever.

It was the Watchtower Society that forced Barbara to go to the media about the judicial hearing convened by the local congregation at orders of the Watchtower's Legal Department. It is obvious that because she went to the media about the sexual abuse issue that she caused divisions among the flock. Why didn't J. R. Brown just say so instead of accusing her of "sins" and blacken her character? It was because headquarters knew there was absolutely no proof she caused divisions by propagating her views about child abuse before she went to the media.

If Barbara was disfellowshipped because of causing divisions, the Apostle Paul should have been disfellowshipped for causing divisions among the flock because he publicized sensational sexual immorality in the Corinthian congregation. Not only did he discuss with the Corinthian Congregation how he felt about the congregation hiding fornication in their midst, he recorded his accusations for millions of people to read in the Bible during the past 2,000 years. Why is it okay for Paul to have gone public revealing disgraceful conduct that was being condoned in the congregation, but when my wife goes public about the organization condoning and protecting immoral people by bad policies, she is punished? Moreover, wicked and immoral acts have been equated to her by applying 1 Cor. 5 as the reason for her disfellowshipping. I believe this to be unchristian. I also believe that disfellowshipping my wife violated the Apostle Paul's command to each one of us to work to keep the congregation clean no matter what the

cost. Furthermore, disfellowshipping her for causing divisions because she publicly spoke out about uncleanness in our organization is a violation of the freedom of speech Christ brought us.

Inasmuch as I cannot be guided by your policies on child molestation, it is difficult for me to remain an elder. I'm not expecting a response to this letter. If any changes in your policies occur, I'm sure they will appear in our publications.

Thank you for considering this letter and I hope nothing less than the Christian thing will be done in behalf of the victims and those speaking out.

Sincerely,

A. J. Anderson XC: Manchester, TN Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses