

Witness Name: Shayne Troy Mechen

Statement No: WITN1371001

Dated: 8 September 2022

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SHAYNE TROY MECHEM

I, Shayne Troy Mechen, will say as follows: –

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 I was born into the Jehovah's Witnesses faith in 1968.

1.2 I am 54 years old.

1.3

GRO-C

1.4 I was formerly an elder in the congregation.

1.5 I was separated from my wife and two children when I left the faith. I have since resumed contact with my daughter who is now outside of the faith herself.

1.6 I now provide support for others who are former Jehovah's Witnesses members and for those within who want to leave the faith.

- 1.7 My purpose in making this statement is to help inform the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care about the emotional and psychological abuse by this religious institution on its members and those disfellowshipped (excommunicated from the faith) and the ongoing impacts of such abuse.
- 1.8 Throughout my statement I will refer to the Jehovah's Witnesses as "JW".

2. MY EARLY YEARS AND LIFE AS A JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

- 2.1 I was born in Napier into the JW faith, there was no choice for me. I was only four days old at my first JW meeting – accompanying my parents. My life up until the age of 42 years revolved solely around the JW, its beliefs, rules, restrictions, and all-encompassing lifestyle.
- 2.2 It was what I was taught from the platform, and it was instilled in me by my father.
- 2.3 There were four children in our family. I was the oldest, then my brother and my two sisters.
- 2.4 My grandmother was JW. My father was baptised in the JW in 1960 and my mother got baptised around 1970 after she married my father.
- 2.5 My weekends were consumed doing JW activities. There was no time for playing sports; no spending time with friends or going to barbecues, other than at JW events. We could play during school hours, but when not at school, I was not allowed any association with other children who were outside of the religion.
- 2.6 I would spend a lot of time by myself, doing things like fishing.
- 2.7 My parents moved to Marton, with three of us kids there. We then moved to Pakowhai (about half-way between Hastings and Napier). Later we moved to Avondale Road in Taradale, Hawkes Bay. I recall going to Pakowhai school and later Greenmeadows school.
- 2.8 Tamatea, in Napier, was our next move, and I went to intermediate and high school there.
- 2.9 As a youngster I hated school. I struggled with spelling and writing. School was not a place I wanted to be. I could not see the point of going to school because I had been taught through my religion that in 1975 (when I was to be seven years old) Armageddon was going to happen. The religion constantly reinforced this belief to its members.

- 2.10 When the great battle of Armageddon would take place in 1975, all non-JW would be killed. I truly believed this. It had been instilled in me from birth, so I believed it would happen.
- 2.11 Although 1975 came and went without Armageddon, I only started to critically think about 10 years ago.
- 2.12 I was taught from the faith platform. Like the other members, I read only JW publications, and, as a younger person, I did not think outside of that. We were instructed not to read certain publications. So, we had no skill of thinking openly. We were not allowed to question what we were taught in the faith.
- 2.13 We were to “be seen not heard”. On the few occasions that I did question my father about my religious teachings, he would say, “Come on Shayne, let’s not bother about that!”
- 2.14 As a little boy, I did what I was told most of the time. My father worked lots of jobs – printing, gardening, and other work. My mum started working in shops after my youngest sister was around five years old.
- 2.15 I was baptised in 1983 aged 15 years old.
- 2.16 Growing up as a JW child, I attended the Napier congregation. JW call their churches “Kingdom Halls”, they don’t use the term “church”. This reflects JW belief that God’s Kingdom will come. So, every congregation has a Kingdom Hall. In Napier, there was only one Kingdom Hall to begin with, then the congregation increased to the point they needed two (an East and a West). We moved then to the West congregation.
- 2.17 Congregations vary in size: at Pahiatua (where I moved to later), there would be around 40 people; in Napier, before the congregation split into two, there were around 150 people.
- 2.18 With the impending Armageddon predicted for 1975, this increased congregation numbers, as more people were coming into the JW to be saved.
- 2.19 My typical routine as a child, was always attending the three sets of JW meetings each week. On Sunday there was a meeting from 10am to 12 noon. There were two meetings in that time. One meeting was a public talk. The other was the reading from the Watchtower magazine, with an elder or ministerial servant reading from the Watchtower. This would be a study article, with a question-and-answer format.

- 2.20 A ministerial servant helps the elders. Depending on his maturity, he may be used for other functions. Not all ministerial servants become elders. Only male members can become ministerial servants and elders. It is a personal choice to follow this path, but you must be committed to the faith and nominated by the leaders.
- 2.21 The first Tuesday meeting was a theocratic ministry school, with an assigned bible reading of 18 or 19 verses. Every young person is required to attend this. This helped me improve my reading skills. It also helped my confidence in public speaking, because at age seven or eight, I was being encouraged and trained to speak in front of others.
- 2.22 For the JW, this was relevant in door-knocking, where we were standing at people's doors speaking with them about the faith. Later in life this confidence helped me in my business.
- 2.23 Timing for the Tuesday meetings could vary from place to place, but usually the first meeting was from 7pm for around 45 minutes. The second Tuesday meeting was a service meeting and takes another 45 minutes. This was to help you with knocking on people's doors and approaching them. We were instructed on how to talk to people, approach people, and deal with people's questions. If we had school homework, that took second place to the JW meetings. There was no importance placed on learning at school.
- 2.24 On Thursdays, the meeting was for book study. A publication like Watchtower would be read, with questions about each paragraph. This would take about an hour. If members of the fellowship do not go, it is seen as a sign of weakness.
- 2.25 Each congregation has a command structure, with each congregation managed by a body of elders. In each congregation, there would be what was called a Presiding Overseer – this role is now called a COBE, which stands for Co-ordinator of the Body of Elders. There is also a glorified mail boy who distributes the mail.
- 2.26 The COBE role can be misused, as what the COBE said went most of the time, but not all people in that role are like that.
- 2.27 There would be another elder who was like a personal secretary, taking the minutes.
- 2.28 Another role was the Service Overseer, who monitors the door-knocking or cart witnessing.

- 2.29 Cart witnessing started around 2014, with the JWs having new management and lots of changes at that time. JWs who do cart witnessing do not really talk to people, they just stand next to a cart with JW publications, and if people express an interest, they're directed to the jw.org website.
- 2.30 This is different to how I was taught, which was about defending the bible and speaking to the public.
- 2.31 Being a JW was all I ever knew. I followed what I was taught and avoided questioning it.
- 2.32 My father had aspirations for me which included door-knocking for JW.
- 2.33 Apart from the meetings during the week, three times a year there are assemblies, which are designed for encouragement and for experiences. There can also be special assembly days.
- 2.34 Circuit assemblies would be for two days, and special assemblies for one day. District conventions used to be for up to eight days, but these have since shrunk to four days. Assemblies would take place in different locations.
- 2.35 There used to be five districts in New Zealand, split into Upper North Island, next from the Bombay Hills down to Taranaki, then the rest of the North Island, with two districts in the South Island. Each district would have around 30 congregations. The distribution and number of congregations is different now to what it was then. I used to be in District 3, which had around 25 congregations.
- 2.36 For each district, the Circuit Overseer would visit every congregation annually, this still applies.
- 2.37 The District Overseer is above the Circuit Overseer and goes around the whole of New Zealand. He's there to encourage at the circuit and district meetings – to keep on going, to hold faith.
- 2.38 There was no recruiting pressure, no targets in the JW. They would try to upskill you to be better at door-knocking.
- 2.39 The JW leadership was, and still is, male dominated. People outside of the religion are referred to as "worldly people".
- 2.40 My father was committed to the JW rules and procedures. He was an elder for a period.
- 2.41 There are no celebrations such as Christmas or birthdays, though we would observe the death of Jesus Christ.

- 2.42 When I was at Tamatea High School, there were around six kids from my congregation at my school. A lot of JW kids my age went to other schools in Napier.
- 2.43 I first heard of “disfellowship” when I was between 12 and 15 years old. It was seldom talked about. I don’t think that I had heard of disfellowship before my baptism in 1983. It was around this time that a German man in our congregation, walked into the Kingdom Hall and threw his JW publications amongst the fellowship. He and his wife were then seen as bad people who had started to question the teachings. They were later disfellowshipped.
- 2.44 JW produce a large quantity of publications. I am fascinated by some of the things I have learnt, and I still collect JW publications using Ebay. There is a 1904 JW publication which states that “Education is anti-Christian”. Even that far back it was taught by the JW that education will make people question and that is not a good thing for the faith. I prefer the JW hard-copy publications. The hard copy cannot be manipulated, so the newer JW website publishing better suits their requirements.
- 2.45 JW did not encourage members to attend university. It was taught that learned people would lead you astray, leading to bad thoughts that may cause you to question the scriptures and may even cause you to leave the faith.
- 2.46 There is a lot of spin in JW publications. The faith is rule-based, and image is important. As a child you are told, from the pulpit, to take JW leaflets to school. Young children are encouraged to consider their school as their own territory for teaching about God.
- 2.47 My own daughter did this in school, she stood all the kids up. Her teacher stopped it. To JW, this was persecution, for Jesus’ and Jehovah’s sake. Being bullied by children outside of the faith was a badge of honour. JW kids get bullied and abused. I suffered a lot of abuse because I was different.
- 2.48 As a kid, I liked going to conventions to meet friends. I also had family outside the JW. I was born on the same day of the year as my non-JW granddad (my mother’s father). He was upset that I was not allowed to celebrate our birthday. I stayed occasionally at my grandparents, but my father would not enter their house.
- 2.49 I was told as a kid that others will try to sway me. I was the oldest grandchild, and I did not know my cousins, on that side of the family, very well.

2.50 On my dad's side, he had an adopted sister. She was a JW, then dropped out, with no real contact. This broke the family apart. I had adopted grandparents in Marton who were JW.

"In care"

2.51 The JW does not administer schools or other institutions that have a duty of care for young or vulnerable JW members. However, the faith does have an elevated level of control over its members, and it often splits families up through its strict adherence to its own policy of shunning and disfellowshipping members. In congregations the JW does provide some teaching through its theocratic ministry school sessions once a week. These are around 20 minutes in duration and teach some reading skills and they prepare members with answers to some of the questions that they may be asked in their door-knocking service.

2.52 In field service, JW children and young people are paired-up with adult JW members when out knocking on doors. During JW working bee's, children are told to go with others who are not family members. In situations like this, the children and young people are in the care of the adult JW members, who are responsible for them at these times.

2.53 Because JW do not associate with worldly people outside of the faith, all social interaction is with JW and children are often cared for by other JW adults.

2.54 Members are discouraged from reporting matters to the Police because they are considered by those within the faith to be part of the "worldly" population outside of the JW faith. The Police are seen as evil and under Satan's control.

2.55 Matters requiring investigation are to be reported to the elders and dealt with through an internal process led by the congregation elders. This includes crimes like child sexual abuse. In this respect, members could be deemed to be in the care of the JW. Because of the high standing of the elders within the JW and the authority they strongly recommend, members are in their care and under their control.

2.56 Another control the JW has over its members is its rule on blood transfusions. The JW policy about blood transfusions is that JW members do

not receive white blood cells. This 70-year-old, man-made rule is not from the bible. The JW governing body has twisted scripture. Members must sign a declaration that they will not receive blood transfusions. They do this for their children too. This faith commitment costs lives. This form of JW control over peoples' lives, in my opinion, breaches human rights. It's a human right to choose your own medical care.

Elders' responses to rule breaches

- 2.57 The elders' responses depend on the particular body of elders. Elders with strong personalities can sway other elders to think along their lines. Existing relationships and previous interactions between JW members can and are commonly held against people during these processes and sometimes result in those people being isolated at the back of the congregation and then potentially disfellowshipped.
- 2.58 The internal judicial system managed by the elders is often unjust. The two-witness rule has always been used in determining child sexual abuse complaints. This means that a victim of abuse must have a second direct witness to the abuse in order for the elders to find the complaint proven. Elders now ask the victim if there were any "credible witnesses", meaning a witness who is "in good standing". Of course, very few offenders commit child sexual abuse crimes in front of other people.
- 2.59 As a JW you are warned by elders that there will be repercussions if you talk with the Police. The thinking is that reporting such matters publicly denounces Jehovah. This is an unwritten rule.
- 2.60 In 2019, there was a JW Watchtower publication dealing with child abuse. There was one sentence which stated: "you can go to the Police". It suggested that there is no problem with child abuse in JW. It stated that "Professed Christians" from within the JW are the ones responsible for the abuse. This was the publicised view of the JW hierarchy.
- 2.61 I still have copies of JW Watchtower publications. I had a collection when I was growing up. JW members were encouraged to keep these when I was young. Now the JW are told to discard hard-copy publications. Since 2014, everything has been on a web page.

After school

- 2.62 I left school at 15 years old and attended a district JW convention in Wellington over the Christmas. I had my school leaver's certificate, I was baptised, and my father had always encouraged me to be a Pioneer in the JW.
- 2.63 Whether a Regular or Special Pioneer, this involved door-knocking. A Regular Pioneer has to door-knock for 90 hours each month (or 1000 hours a year). For six months, I was an Auxiliary Pioneer. Auxiliary Pioneers are required to complete 60 hours of door-knocking each month. I then applied to be a Regular Pioneer. At the time, I believed this was what I should be doing. I felt a need to do this.
- 2.64 From around September 1983 (September being the start of the JW service year), I was a Regular Pioneer for four years, which is unpaid. JW members involved are encouraged to have a job, to have an income that supports you through your time of knocking on doors. Many JW hold down cleaning jobs, such as window cleaning. Having a suitable job frees you up to go knocking on doors and attempting to spread the word about the JW faith.
- 2.65 As a Regular Pioneer, JW members door-knock about three hours a day, the aim being 90 hours a month. At the end of the service year, Regular Pioneers are evaluated as to whether they have achieved JW expectations, based on the hours of door-knocking completed.
- 2.66 I worked in Chinese restaurants, cleaning up yards, and worked in a furniture shop. I did whatever I could to earn money. I then left home at 18 years old in 1986 and I continued as a Regular Pioneer.
- 2.67 I moved to Waiheke Island because there were no Regular Pioneers there. On Waiheke, I worked in a general store for four hours in the morning, then spent the afternoons knocking on doors. JW Pioneers go where "the need is greatest".

Male dominance

- 2.68 In a group of JW, a baptised male (regardless of his age) holds a level of authority above any adult woman. This is part of the "headship" arrangement, which I explain later in my statement.

After Waiheke Island

- 2.69 I had to get off Waiheke Island as there were too many females. I was a naïve single male; I had no idea of the opposite sex. I went to Dannevirke.
- 2.70 JW members are given guidelines about what to look for in a mate. It's not about personality; it's about how active people are in the JW faith, helping older JW people, how many hours door-knocking they do, what their parents are like. JW members are encouraged as male or female to think certain ways. You can stay single. When tribulation comes, it's easier to just look after just yourself than family. I had no realistic ideas about marriage when I did get married, because my learning had all been based on JW teachings.
- 2.71 After Dannevirke, I moved to Newlands in Johnsonville for 18 months and was appointed as a ministerial servant and then on to Pahiatua.

Getting married

- 2.72 I moved as a single man from Dannevirke to Johnsonville, and got engaged to [GRO-B-1], who was from the Lower Hutt JW congregation. We met for the first time when I was a groomsman for a friend who was getting married, and [GRO-B-1] was a bridesmaid.
- 2.73 It is frowned upon by the JW if you get engaged to a non-JW. [GRO-B-1]'s parents, like my father, were very committed to following JW rules.
- 2.74 We married in 1989, both aged 21, and lived in Newlands, Wellington. We were married for 22 years and had two kids, 19 months apart: [GRO-B-2] who is now 30 and [GRO-B-3] who is 28 years old.
- 2.75 We lived mostly in Pahiatua, from 1991. Again, this was because, as a JW, you move to where you are called to move to by the JW, where the need is greatest.

Becoming an elder

- 2.76 I was a ministerial servant and then I became an elder at 28 years old, in 1995. I was an elder for 12 years. I wanted to be an elder. This was a goal put forward by my father and Watchtower. They want people to step forward and be useful to congregation.

- 2.77 At that time, I felt committed as a JW and I stuck to the rules. I closely followed the rules in “Shepherd the Flock of God” book which elders each have a copy of. I always conformed. Thinking back, I did self-question, but every time I did this, I would naturally follow the line my father had taken, “Oh come on Shayne!” I did not openly speak up about my doubts. I was concerned that any doubt I displayed would be reported to the leaders. I simply assumed that I was being weak because I had been taught that “only weak people question the JW faith”.
- 2.78 To become an elder, like becoming a ministerial servant, the JW use scripture outlining what an elder should be. There are particular parts of the bible that are used as guidelines. They consider whether he is setting a good example, how does he behave as a husband, is he reprehensible. There are seven to 10 different suggestions as to what an older man in the congregation should be, from personal habits, to looking at others, to how does he regard Watchtower?
- 2.79 I was a dad living in Pahiatua. I had been door-knocking and attending all meetings. There was no other test to become an elder in 1995. The leaders observe you over time and monitor your attitudes. I was a ministerial servant before becoming an elder. There is no formal document. Your appointment as an elder is simply announced to the congregation.
- 2.80 The Circuit Overseer comes for a talk to the elders and ministerial servants, in a Friday night meeting. There’s also no set number of elders in each congregation. A letter would be sent off to the branch office (which JW refer to as “the Branch” and “the Bethel”), which was in Auckland back then. And a letter would have come back to the congregation. (In 2014, the JWs sold the Auckland Branch; now for New Zealand congregations, the Bethel is in Australia.)

3. MY EXPERIENCE AS AN ELDER

- 3.1 So, I was asked to become an elder. And as an elder I wondered what I’d gotten into. I was never prepared for the extra responsibility. There was a lot of time pressure, balancing my family commitments and my JW meeting roles. The position included other shepherding calls, visiting members of the congregation to assist them, or to go over encouraging articles from

- Watchtower. So, I'd be out another night each week on top of other meetings. Plus, urgent meetings.
- 3.2 I might have wanted to take the kids to a park, but I'd have to leave that to my wife. And if a wife is not a good example, that disqualifies you from being an elder. My wife was supportive. But I shared very little with my wife about my elder duties. I was "Secret squirrel", even though she wanted to know more.
- 3.3 A judicial committee would be arranged for something like drunken behaviour by one of the JW members. The Circuit Overseer might come, plus elders that had been elders for a long time. They would talk to the person. There would usually be three on a committee. For child sexual abuse, it is generally three elders, but it can be up to six elders. I never personally sat on any judicial committee for child sexual abuse.
- 3.4 Morality cases – meaning sex outside of marriage, family violence, and young ones doing what young ones do, and drug use – these all might result in a judicial committee being formed. In all JW congregations, there's a culture of telling the elders. People also come up and self-confess. Plus, there is a lot of hearsay put forward. As an elder, you're obliged to do something if it's reported. There are some marital affairs in the JW church.
- 3.5 Most things had to be dealt with in a timely manner. For every single issue, a written record is kept. For child sexual abuse, JW will never ever destroy these records, however not all details are recorded on forms. Elders take personal notes but these are later destroyed. The forms that go to Watchtower are unlikely to ever be made available to an inquiry. A judicial committee would send a blue envelope to the Auckland Bethel, and it would be kept in their database. There would be a record of the perpetrator, and what's he done to prove he's sorry. I know that for the JW, the act of speaking out publicly against the JW is considered worse than being a child rapist.
- 3.6 These days, it's changed a bit from blue envelopes. It is now electronic based, but paper records are kept in the congregation. I know this from the latest elders' book. There are lots of leaks in Watchtower, so I have the latest "Shepherd the Flock of God". And there are rules about this elders' book. For example, no women are allowed to look at it – because it is

- scriptural; if you are getting it physically bound, you must supervise, so no one can see it.
- 3.7 Women are not part of the headship arrangement, which goes from Jehovah to Jesus Christ, then Circuit Overseers, then other JW officers, to elders, husbands, wives, then children. Any time that women need to do a meeting part (which they are allowed to do when assigned), there are two women on stage talking to each other. They must wear a head covering. This is showing appropriate respect to the headship arrangement.
- 3.8 As part of the JW judicial process, elders inquire into cases of child sexual abuse. There is strong encouragement not to use names – there’s secrecy about child sexual abuse. But names are spread.
- 3.9 I was aware of an event in which a building had been tagged. The policy for that was to go to the Police. But for JW, usually the first response is to phone the Service department at the branch office, who will decide if the case should go to the Police. I never sat on any child abuse cases.
- 3.10 For child sexual abuse, the JW leadership has the approach: don’t speak about it to the congregation. Any elder who reported the matter to Police would be removed from his position as an elder.
- 3.11 JW child sex abuses are not reported to Police because to do so brings shame to Jehovah; JW do not go to the Police. From the time you’re a child, it’s, “Go to the elders, the elders will deal with it.”
- 3.12 There is no formally recognised training for elders in dealing appropriately with child sex abuse complaints, no psychology training or qualification requirement. The only training is in simple JW procedure. There is nothing on mental health, drug abuse or dealing with victims.
- 3.13 As an elder, I sat on many judicial cases. One of those cases was a complaint of male assaults female. The Police became aware of the incident and got involved. I had strong words to the male. He was a security guard, and he had exploded. Elders generally deal with things like this and do not go to the Police, unless it’s something like a JW building is burnt down, or like the Christchurch attack.
- 3.14 Concerning the two-witness rule: this was not a problem at the time I was an elder. I stuck by the rules. I never had to deal with such cases.
- 3.15 For child sex abuse, there is now a rider to the two-witness rule. If two children say the same guy touched them, you can take action – it depends

on his reputation. There is no justice or fairness in the JW judicial procedures. If a JW male's car is sighted outside a female's house overnight (inappropriate relationship), he is disfellowshipped. But a JW male will not be disfellowshipped for child sexual abuse.

- 3.16 As an elder, I had to determine outcomes. I wouldn't be an elder now. I used to ask the victim, what would you like us to do? If there is a denial by the alleged abuser, JW rules are that that is the end of the matter. Regardless of the crime, the two-witness rule applies. JW members are taught that all other JW members are trustworthy.

Some experiences in relation to sex cases, from a number around the country

- 3.17 I helped a victim from a Pahiatua paedophile ring to go to the Police. I got an acknowledgement letter from the alleged offender, and the victim was able to turn his life around with that acknowledgement. The JW member who brought this matter to the attention of the elders did not go to the Police.
- 3.18 Any elders' personal notes relating to judicial meetings with accused JW members get destroyed. A confidential and simplified summary of the case is provided only to the Branch. It is not disclosed to the congregation.
- 3.19 We didn't report on things that I sat on, such as minor things like boy-girl stuff. I would ask, "What would you like us to do to help you?" Most said they wanted to leave the JW.
- 3.20 Drug use came the closest to crime. We disfellowshipped someone for occasional marijuana use. A JW advised us of this, and the person confessed. After they were out of JW, they were happy; they had not known how to get out. We were following the rules in the JW "Shepherd the Flock of God" rule book.
- 3.21 All but one, we gave a choice to.
- 3.22 Normally the body of elders make the final decision about the appropriate outcome, but if it affected them personally it may be dealt with more harshly.
- 3.23 The JW subject can appeal, in which case another committee will be appointed by the Circuit Overseers, for another interrogation of the individual. Sometimes the result is overturned, but generally it is not.

4. LEAVING THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES FAITH

- 4.1 In my view, people will be people. Around the same time that I wrote my resignation letter, GRO-B-2 asked her brother, “Why is dad no longer a JW?” And GRO-B-3’s answer to her was, “Even the strong will fall” – that’s what my father had said to GRO-B-3.
- 4.2 I left the JW aged 42 but had stepped down as an elder two years earlier and we had moved to Upper Hutt. I had been a lone elder in our congregation for a while, and things started to get to me.
- 4.3 I did not know what I wanted but I did recognise that I no longer wanted to be a JW. When I went to Upper Hutt there was nothing. I was busy for a long time. When JW people learn that something has happened to you, they avoid you – it is a soft shunning. “*Shayne Mechen is no longer a JW.*” People make assumptions. Gossip takes over.
- 4.4 I had written a disassociation letter, saying I did not want to be a JW. An elder at Upper Hutt wanted to help, to see if he could keep me as a JW.
- 4.5 My wife wanted me to be involved in the JW as I had previously been – all the JW activities, the door-knocking, helping with the building. I struggled with this and found that it just wasn’t in me anymore. I did not particularly have more doubts than I had earlier, I was just sick and tired of it all.
- 4.6 Going back in my life I first started doubting the JW when I was about nine-and-a-bit years. It has been a long time.
- 4.7 JW protect paedophiles, although they deny it. I had seen a newspaper article and then started researching. It was clear to me that the JW two-witness rule protected paedophiles. By not reporting such matters to Police, the community is in danger.
- 4.8 In 2017 I started getting involved in JW’s 4 Justice. I needed to do something.
- 4.9 The JW teach members that if they leave the JW they will become alcoholics, promiscuous etc. I was mindful that I did not want this for myself. I searched the Internet, and it opened my eyes to what the JW had not taught its members.
- 4.10 My daughter did this too. She started questioning. She is now long gone out of JW. She got disfellowshipped for sleeping with a guy and getting pregnant. She went back for 18 months, but experienced no true love, because she was tainted in the JW, having previously been

- disfellowshipped. She had initially been curious as to why I had left, and I thought she was going to attempt to get me back in the JW.
- 4.11 Asking questions can help people get out of the JW. I think a lot of JW members don't want to be there.
- 4.12 There was a recent case in the US, where a JW male started to question the JW. During the Covid lockdowns, he began researching. After the lockdowns he went back to the church meetings, but he ended up dying GRO-C, because the leaders had told his wife that she must leave him because he had started questioning the JW.
- 4.13 When young people are disfellowshipped or shunned, their whole support system is taken away. They turn to the support of outsiders, which can be a difficult transition, because JW members are taught throughout their childhood years that people outside of the faith (worldly people) are not caring.
- 4.14 Some JW leavers are so impacted by being separated from everything they know that they become suicidal.
- 4.15 JWs who leave the religion often go into their shell, isolate, suffer mental health issues. It can take years to get out of the JW mindset, because JW are taught that the world outside of the faith is Satan's world. When I left, I tried not to think about it!
- 4.16 I had built up a group of people I knew outside of the JW. Because of my business, I had a circle already in place, but young ones don't have this.
- 4.17 I put my letter in and I was shunned straight away. There is no point in trying to stay connected. But at the time you do not fully understand what that will do to you. My son who remained in the JW told me that he would not stop talking to me. But the JW put pressure on my son to stop communicating with me. He does not talk to me now. I do not know where he is, but I know he's near GRO-C. Now, when I think about the cost of having lost my relationship with my son, I feel the real emotional impact of my decision to leave the faith. My daughter GRO-B-2 is in GRO-C, and we talk all the time.
- 4.18 My marriage lasted 22 years and ended after I left the JW. I wouldn't describe it as being a good marriage. It was based on JW thinking. At 21 years of age neither of us knew what red flags were. All of our thinking was faith-based, and we knew very little outside of this.

- 4.19 There is pressure from JWs that married couples act in certain ways. Sometimes that succeeded. I was too scared to talk to anyone in the JW about marriage issues and the JW constantly teach you that the world outside the faith is a horrible place with no one to help you.
- 4.20 Now that I have left the faith, I try to support other JW leavers.
- 4.21 In 2017 I also did some research about historic child abuse in the faith. In the elders' manual, it said that if an elder did something years ago, and God's holy spirit is on him, he doesn't need to step down.
- 4.22 JW is part of my history. I still find it fascinating. Through various sources, I still get JW electronic documents, such as PDFs, outlining their policies. This material is available to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.
- 4.23 I know that there are still several pretending elders, too scared to leave the faith because of the cost to them of leaving. I believe about 60 percent of them fit into this category. Some though, are hard core and would never consider leaving.
- 4.24 A lot of young JW only remain in the faith to avoid upsetting their parents. In the middle are the ones who have doubts, but, at the same time, like the idea of living in Paradise.
- 4.25 Any data that the JW disseminates openly about its membership numbers, cannot be relied on as being truthful.

Information from the ex-JW community

- 4.26 Information is "dropped". It's easy to get info from the ex-JW community. I am not contacted by people inside the JW religion – I am now seen as an apostate to the JW.

5. IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

- 5.1 When people leave the JW many of them believe that the world is against them. As a result of the JW policies and rules around non-association with those who are isolated and disfellowshipped, the leavers' relationships with their friends, and in most cases their families, are taken away from them.

- 5.2 It can be a real struggle to make new friends. It is instilled in them from a young age not to trust people outside the faith. They naturally don't want to turn to counsellors for help because "they might lead you astray".
- 5.3 JW leavers find it difficult talking to qualified people who generally have very little knowledge about the closed-community lifestyle, terminology and mindsets. Since leaving the faith, I have remained mindful of this, and I have created a contacts list of people who JW leavers can feel comfortable talking to.
- 5.4 There's a counsellor in Palmerston North who has helped me a lot. Through her meetings with me she has learnt a lot about JW and this has placed her in a better position to professionally work with other JW leavers.
- 5.5 Another difficulty for leavers is JW financial abuse. In the faith people don't save for the future because they're taught that following Armageddon they will live in Paradise, so no focus is put on home ownership or saving.
- 5.6 From my experience of being involved in a JW leavers' Facebook group and JW's 4 Justice, I know it's difficult to get JW leavers to consider the simple things outside of the faith. This is because JW constantly condition their members' minds to consider the JW life only.
- 5.7 The JW will not openly share statistics on JW family separations and the impacts on peoples' lives.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

JW caregiver and working with children vetting

- 6.1 Teachers and caregivers must be vetted. Young JW men caring for young ones, how do we know they're suitable to be caring for a child? When dealing with people, males with responsibility, could include family members.

Mandatory reporting to Police

- 6.2 There should be mandatory reporting of all matters involving child abuse. The first thing should be to report to Police. JW claim that the spiritual wellbeing of the congregation is their primary concern, so I ask why not appropriately report matters of this nature to Police?

- 6.3 Child abusers should not be allowed back into the congregation after repenting. The safety of the children in the JW congregation must become the priority.

Stop JW child baptism

- 6.4 JW child baptism must cease. Getting baptised is a lifelong religious contract. People under the age of 18 years are not appropriately life-experienced or knowledgeable to make such commitments. JW allow their young people to get baptised while they're still under their parents' influence and unfairly lock them in to lives of commitment to the JW faith.

Stop JW shunning

- 6.5 Shunning must be stopped. Nowhere in the bible does it say it's right to shun family and friends. Shunning and disfellowshipping are man-made rules.

Stop JW child indoctrination

- 6.6 JW indoctrination of children must not be allowed to continue. It's right to teach our young people good morals – like no stealing and being kind to elderly people – but when it comes to the JW fear-based indoctrination, this should not be allowed. JW children are taught that if they disobey elders and parents, they will die. They are taught to put Jehovah ahead of themselves and their own wants and needs.

Cancel JW charity trust status

- 6.7 The JW church qualifies for charity trust status because they push their own religion on outsiders by door-knocking and street preaching. The JW do not provide a benefit to the community. JW will argue that their door-knocking is a benefit to the community. The JW church transfers the funds it receives from charity into JW-owned corporations to avoid its tax obligations. JWs 4 Justice intend to write to the Charities Commission about how the JW church truly operates.
- 6.8 There are currently around 15,000 JW members in New Zealand and the organisation claims around \$12 million dollars (shown in their tax return).

They move money into corporations to avoid tax. Two years ago, Australian JW sent \$20 million overseas (assume Germany) to protect itself from its tax obligations.

- 6.9 Recently, the government announced that charities with over \$140,000.00 must provide transparency of their accounts and evidence of a benefit to the community.
- 6.10 The JW church expects its members to use their own resources in support of the church. Members build Kingdom Halls, to which ownership is then handed over to Watchtower. Watchtower can then decide to sell such assets and benefit from such sales.
- 6.11 There is currently a trend of JW selling Kingdom Halls, for example Te Aroha.
- 6.12 They closed the congregation and buildings in Auckland. They sold the Branch for \$14 million – no one knows where the funds went.
- 6.13 In Australia JW is selling high-value properties.

Investigate and prosecute JW human rights breaches

- 6.14 The JW church discriminates against homosexuality and LGBT.
- 6.15 The JW church has truly little – if any – race diversity and is dominated by European males.
- 6.16 All people regardless of their beliefs should have the right to education, however the JW strongly discourage higher education. If it is discovered that an elder's child has attended a university, the elder would be disfellowshipped. The 1904 JW Watchtower magazine stated that education was anti-Christian. From the 1870s, JWs were taught, "You don't need schooling because you're going to Paradise". Attending university was not an option for me as a member of the JW faith. My life could have been so different.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

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STATEMENT OF TRUTH

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Signed: GRO-C

Dated: 8/10/22

GRO-C

GRO-C