

Irish 2x2 Workers Cover Up Activities of Paedophile Colleague

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As a 2x2 professing child in the mid-70's, I was subjected to homosexual abuse by a 2x2 worker. The abuse was reported to the senior workers, but no effective action was taken, and my abuser was sent to another region where he continued to abuse boys. I left the 2x2s in 1983/84, and my parents were excommunicated in 1994. Although I am no longer in the 2x2 group, I feel I have a duty to expose the facts about these matters. My reasons for publishing the following article include desires to achieve the following:

- Expose the facts that sexual abuse of children by a 2x2 worker has happened, its occurrence was covered up, and the victims were ignored.
- Encourage 2x2 parents to be vigilant.
- Encourage changes in the method of dealing with sexual abuse within the 2x2s.
- Demonstrate to workers that their decisions on such matters will increasingly be given world-wide exposure, and that it will become more difficult to cover up cases of sexual abuse.
- Reduce the likelihood of reoccurrence of such abuse.
- Encourage other victims to speak out.
- Encourage 2x2 members to question the judgement and authority of the workers.
- Encourage junior and female workers to question the judgement and authority of the senior workers (usually male).

Background

I come from a Northern Irish family where my parents and both sets of grandparents were members of the religious group which is sometimes known as the two-by-twos. (Occasionally members of the sect are erroneously given the name Cooneyites). In Ireland, the members refer to their group as the 'testimony', 'the way' or the 'truth', and the members refer to themselves as 'the friends' or 'the saints'. In May 1973, aged 13, I became a professing member. Just over one year later, two brother workers started a mission in our locality, Tyrone. One of the workers, Noel Tanner, visited our home regularly, and often attended the Sunday morning meeting which was held in our home. During these visits, I was the victim of sexual assaults by [Noel Tanner](#). (See ['74/'75 workers' list](#).)

Noel Tanner was born and raised in the 2x2s and came from Co. Cork. My recollection is that he was dark-haired, 5'8" to 5'10" tall and heavily built. He had a typical respectable 'worker' appearance. I estimate that Noel Tanner was in his late thirties at the time of the sexual abuse.

I was sexually assaulted five or six times, but the two particular occasions described below are vividly recalled.

The Sexual Abuse

The sexual abuse took place on the weekends when Noel Tanner would stay at our house in order to take part in the Sunday morning meeting. On the first occasion, Noel Tanner requested that I accompany him on a walk after Sunday lunch. After the walk, he asked me to go to his bedroom for a talk. In the bedroom, he proceeded to sexually abuse me. Afterwards he warned me to not tell anyone. On his last attempt, he came into my bedroom and immediately attempted to touch my private parts. I turned over onto my stomach to protect myself, and pushed the encyclopaedia I was reading under the pillow. He tried to turn me over, but was unable to use much force, as my younger brother was asleep in the bunk overhead. I decided to threaten him with a rifle if he ever attempted to abuse me again.

The Internal Inquiry

It wasn't until about one year after the last assault, i.e. late 1975 or early 1976, that I told my parents about the sexual abuse. They contacted the parents of a close friend of mine, Peter (not his real name), and discovered that he too was being sexually abused. Peter had not informed his parents because he assumed that he would not be believed since they held workers in such high regard. Peter's parents and my father reported Noel Tanner's homosexual paedophile activities to the senior workers. Tanner was immediately moved by the workers across the border out of Northern Ireland and into the Irish Republic, where he would be reach of the N. Irish police.

The workers decided to hold a meeting in Omagh, Co. Tyrone, where the fathers of the victims and Noel Tanner presented their cases to the senior workers. The workers present included Hugh Breen (overseer), Joshua Gamble and Willie Wilkin. The victims were not present at this meeting. At the meeting, Peter's father produced a written statement which he had recorded from his son. Peter noted that during the assaults, Noel Tanner was extremely agitated and perspired heavily. After reading the statement, the workers asked Peter's father to destroy it. He complied with their request, as he assumed that they would take effective action.

Later in the meeting, both fathers were given the impression that they were not believed. Noel Tanner made false accusations against his victims and the parents. He claimed that my father had asked him to explain the facts of life to me and in doing this it had been necessary to touch my private parts. He also claimed that I had been reading a book which I did not want him to see at the time of the last assault. In his defence, he also deemed it relevant to mention that Peter's younger sister occasionally wore trousers (pants).

It is interesting to note that Noel Tanner began abusing Peter just a few months after he personally had conducted his baptism. Around that time, the sister workers refused to allow the baptism of Peter's sister. The reason stated by the workers was that she was too young (13), and would have to wait until she was 14. However, minutes earlier, the same sister workers had helped to prepare a younger child for baptism. Peter's parents believe that baptism was refused because the girl occasionally wore jeans.

On his deathbed, Willie Wilkin (the overseer at that time) allegedly acknowledged that a dreadful mistake had been made with regard to the internal inquiry in 1976. However, no worker contacted me or any of the other victims known to me.

The Cover-up

After the meeting, the workers took no effective action against Noel Tanner, and he was allowed to remain on the workers' list. He was moved to Dublin in the Irish Republic, and the whole affair was suppressed. In '76/'77 Irvine Pearson was his companion. The ['79/'80 workers' list](#) shows that he was assigned to Limerick and West in '79/'80, where he was accompanied by Wilson Greene. In the ['82/'83 workers' list](#), his name appears at the bottom, but he was not assigned to a 'field'. During the period from '76 to '83, Noel Tanner was always assigned to a 'field' in the Irish Republic. I believe this was done to ensure that he was outside the jurisdiction of the British authorities.

In the area where Noel Tanner had been preaching (Tyrone), the 2x2s were not given any information by the workers about his conduct. However, rumours developed among the 'friends'. The elder's wife in the home where Peter's parents met on Sunday mornings mistakenly assumed that Peter's mother was having an affair with Noel Tanner. She then targeted the victim's mother by preaching about Jezebel in her Sunday morning testimonies. Peter's parents eventually revealed to her the truth about Noel Tanner's paedophile activities in order to prevent untruthful gossip.

During the period from the enquiry in 1976 to 1982, I remember feeling extremely angry when Noel Tanner's name would appear on each new workers' list. On one occasion, I refused to shake his proffered hand at a funeral. Recently, an expert in the police informed me that the shameless attitude of Noel Tanner is characteristic of most paedophiles - they will protest their innocence right up to the prison gates, despite mountains of evidence to the contrary.

Other Victims

In addition to myself, I know of **ELEVEN** other young males who were sexually abused by Noel Tanner, and I suspect there were many others. I also know of **ONE** attempted molestation of a 12/13 year-old boy.

Noel Tanner's Subsequent Activities

In the early 1980's, a non-2x2 person reported Noel Tanner to the police, and in December 1984 he was convicted for sexual offences by a court in the Republic of Ireland. Again, the 2x2s very effectively suppressed the details of this offence and conviction. After serving his sentence, I believe that he temporarily moved to England.

The '82/'83 workers' list was the last on which his name appeared, and I believe that he was put out of the work around the time of his conviction in December 1984.

In January 1991, Noel Tanner was again convicted for sexual offences against adolescent boys. At this time, the following article appeared in the Cork Examiner newspaper.

Fined for act of indecency

A man was fined £50 by Justice B. J. Carroll at Fermoy Court yesterday for committing an act of gross indecency with a male person at Pike Road, Ballinamona, Fermoy, on June 8, 1988.

Robert Noel Tanner, Crush, Glanmire was also disqualified from holding a driving licence for two years in view of the fact that a vehicle was used in the commission of the offence.

He also admitted two other similar charges involving a 13 1/2 -year-old male, and two further charges of indecently assaulting the same person.

The Justice, having considered a welfare report, remanded the defendant on bail to Fermoy Court on May 13 in relation to the four latter charges which were stated to have been committed in Mallow during June-July 1987.

A condition of the order was that the defendant remains under the supervision of the court welfare service and complies with any directives which it might give regarding the availing of medical treatment or otherwise.

The court was told that the defendant deeply regretted the offences which occurred when the treatment he was then getting was not proving a success.

He was prepared to co-operate with the court welfare service which would give him the opportunity of continuing his present treatment which was proving to be successful.

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Despite these convictions, and the clear knowledge that while he was a worker Noel Tanner had sexually abused at least two children, I can state the following with certainty:

- The workers (and 2x2 parents) did not report the criminal offences to the police.
- The workers did not attempt to determine the nature and extent of the abuse.
- The workers did not attempt to identify and locate any of Noel Tanner's victims who are known to me.
- The workers did not offer/arrange counselling for any of the victims who are known to me.
- The workers did not apologise to any of the victims who are known to me. Between 1976 and 1994, no worker ever mentioned the matter to me. Indeed, a senior worker, Irvine Pearson, treated one victim, Peter, with contempt.
- The workers did not apologise to my parents and the other parents who reported the offences in 1976.

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### **Subsequent Treatment of my Family by the Workers**

Despite the inept handling of the matter by a large group of senior workers, and a very adept cover-up by most Irish workers, my parents continued in the 'way'. My parents' only modification to their beliefs was a determination to live by a very strict code of conduct which they themselves believed was in line with the scriptures; not the rules of fallible workers which changed periodically. Consequently, in 1976 they purchased a record player. In the mid-80's they installed a TV. The existence of the TV was known by most of the folks who met in their home.

One Friday, 8 July 1994, four workers (Bertie Anderson, Walter Milligan, Jack Duncan and Willie McBrine) arrived unannounced at my folks' home, and they were ushered into the room which was already prepared for the Sunday AM meeting. They asked if my Dad had a TV. He said yes, and they then asked when he would be getting rid of it. He informed them that he would not be getting rid of the TV. The four workers immediately imposed the following sentence:

- The Sunday morning meeting was removed from their home. (A Sunday morning meeting and union meetings had been held there since 1947.)

- My parents were told they if they attended a meeting, they could not take part (speak or pray) and they would not be allowed to take the emblems (bread and wine).
- They were forbidden to give monetary contributions to the workers.

After the meeting with my parents, the workers reorganised the 2x2 churches in the locality and informed all the members that they would be meeting elsewhere on the following Sunday. The elder/bishop of the church in my parents' home was not consulted regarding any of these arrangements. He was the last person to be informed of my parents' fate.

In the period since my parents' excommunication, close relatives have written to the Irish workers to query their actions. The result has included one relative (an elder) being likened to a 'tare' by Wilson Greene (a worker) in a gospel mission. On Tommie Gamble's instructions, all who met in their Sunday AM meeting were told that workers would no longer have fellowship there, and that they were free to meet elsewhere. No one left. The elder was not told, and only discovered these instructions six months later. Since the elder and his wife had effectively been excluded, they decided to leave the 2x2s.

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## **My Experiences After the Abuse**

I continued in the 'way' until 1983 (aged 23), and during that time, I never received an apology or counselling from any worker. Indeed, in the period from 1975 until 1994, neither the 2x2 workers nor any of the members ever mentioned the abuse by Noel Tanner to me. After my parents' excommunication in 1994, I wrote to Tommie Gamble, the overseer for Ireland (and possibly Europe) and asked a number of questions regarding Noel Tanner, fallibility/infallibility of workers, the history of the 2x2s, etc. I received a brief written response from Tommie. He did not address my questions as he was 'busy at Conventions' in Georgia, but indicated that he when he returned, he would 'go into things and be in touch'.

When Tommie returned from Georgia, he called me and said that he would not give me a written response to my questions. When I then asked him to answer the questions in person, he told me, "you're the one with the problem. You can come to see me". After I threatened him with exposure of the sexual abuse scandal, he immediately agreed to come to my home with a witness, Bertie Anderson. In a meeting with Tommie and Bertie at my home, and in the presence of my wife, I eventually extracted an apology for the workers' handling of the Tanner 'affair', but received few satisfactory answers to my questions.

One of the written questions I asked was: If eternal life is exclusively available to converts of the 'workers' of your organisation, what is the position of those souls who professed through the ministry of Noel Tanner while he was a practising homosexual

child molester? Bertie Anderson responded that 'God would have been working through Noel's companion'.

When other substantive issues and questions were addressed to them, they displayed a ruthless fanaticism and a remarkable lack of many Christian qualities (compassion, mercy, etc.). I also got the clear impression that, as an ex-member of their group, what had happened to me was no longer of any consequence to them. (Others have described this 2x2 trait as a tendency to 'shoot their wounded'.)

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[1st letter to Tommie Gamble](#)

[2nd letter to Tommie Gamble](#)

[3rd letter to Tommie Gamble](#)

[Notes from telephone conversations and meeting with Tommie Gamble](#)

[Letter of apology from Noel Tanner - page 1](#)

[Letter of apology from Noel Tanner - page 2](#)

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## **Personal Consequences Due to the Abuse**

It is difficult to separate the consequences which are directly due to the abuse, from those which are due to other aspects of a childhood in the 2x2s. However, the following particular difficulties are clearly attributable to the abuse by Noel Tanner.

- In common with most victims of sexual assault, I suffered feelings of guilt. A number of questions bothered me - for example: Why did I allow it to happen? Why did I not immediately tell my parents? It has only been in the past few years that I have realised that I was in no way to blame and I now feel absolutely free to talk about the abuse, without any shame or guilt.
  - I still have great difficulty in dealing with the anger that I feel towards the 2x2 system which elevated a criminal such as Noel Tanner to the extent that he could commit sexual crimes against children with almost total impunity. This anger has been a contributory factor in the clinical depression that I have suffered periodically from the time of the abuse until the present. Surprisingly, little of my anger is directed at Noel Tanner - in fact, to this day, I have never even bothered to find out where he is living.
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## Final Points

Recent press coverage indicates that sexual abuse of minors by ministers occurs within most religious organisations. The particularly high frequency of sexual abuse by Catholic priests suggests that celibacy may be a contributory factor. Also the elevated, powerful position of priests and the reverence they are accorded may be contributory factors. 2x2 parents who worship the workers and also expect their children to be obedient to the workers foster an environment where there are many opportunities for abuse to occur. For example, I doubt if my parents would have expected me to go for walks with any other non-worker single man who wasn't a relative. (While celibacy may be a factor, I do know of one local case that took place about 40 years ago, where the husband in a married worker pair assaulted a teenage 2x2 girl.)

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In comparing methods of dealing with sexually abusive ministers, my experience has shown that the methods of the 2x2s are far from superior. In fact, the procedures used by many other denominations, sects and cults for handling incidents of this nature are considerably superior with regard to both victims and perpetrators, and the 2x2s would do well to emulate them.

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It is interesting to note that in many ways, the workers' handling of the abuse by Noel Tanner closely mirrors that of the Catholic Church, of which they speak with much disdain.

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Unmarried and untrained workers are generally ill equipped to deal with matters such as sexual abuse. (Furthermore, they are generally, woefully out-of-touch with reality.)

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Currently, all power and authority resides with the workers (particularly the male overseers) and the members have no recourse. Elders (at least) should be involved in the decision making of the organisation. At present, decision-making and resolution of matters such as sexual abuse is conducted in a fashion similar to that of a dictatorship. Workers' meetings are secret affairs, with no accountability to elders, etc. I suggest that workers should involve elders in decision-making - this may help to narrow the gulf between reality and the current perceptions held by many workers. Involvement by elders may also help to clarify whether the role of workers is to rule or to serve.

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In this case of sexual abuse, the workers' instinctive reaction was to cover-up the facts, and to protect and preserve the reputation of workers and the 2x2 system. (Expressions such as 'for the sake of the Testimony/Kingdom spring to mind). Indeed, preservation of the myth regarding the perfect nature of their ministry and way appears to be at the top of the workers' agenda. I have frequently noticed that workers seem to feel that the 'friends' should always be mindful of their sacrifice, particularly with regard to their celibacy. In their mindset, serious criminal activity, such as deviant sexual behaviour, and abuse of minors appears to be deemed a tolerable price for the 'friends' to pay, in order to have access to ministers who have sacrificed so much.

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The fact that other workers did not view Noel Tanner's crimes with the warranted revulsion was illustrated on two occasions after the internal enquiry.

- About six months after the internal inquiry, a senior worker (Bertie Anderson), attempted to downplay the gravity of Noel Tanner's crimes. My father recalls that he asked, "did he (Noel Tanner) actually do anything".
  - About a year after my parents had reported the abuse, another worker, Herbie Jennings (cousin of Noel Tanner), asked my father if it would be OK to bring Noel Tanner to visit at our home. He even expressed the view that Noel Tanner did not hold any grudges against my dad (presumably for reporting him). However, at this time Herbie was a junior worker, so it is possible that he had not been made aware of the full extent of Noel Tanner's crimes.
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I believe that workers should acknowledge that:

- The current leadership has a duty to accept responsibility for the mishandling of the Noel Tanner affair.
  - The senior workers were guilty of putting their own interests, Noel Tanner's interest and the supposed interests of the 'testimony' before those of the victims of homosexual abuse by Noel Tanner.
  - The failure to make any effort to determine the identity of the victims and to offer any apology and compassion is a sad reflection on the integrity of all the workers who were aware of the activities of Noel Tanner.
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As a final note, concerning the far-reaching effects of sexual abuse, I will add that just prior to my marriage in 1989, a hearty 2x2 married male sexually molested me. As I was leaving his home after a visit, I was puzzled when he switched off the porch light. When I got into my car, he attempted to touch my private parts. I believe that he knew of the assaults by Noel Tanner, and mistakenly assumed that I had homosexual tendencies. He probably thought that this occasion was his last opportunity to start a relationship

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Robert Kee

N. Ireland

[Photograph of Noel Tanner](#)

*Please email [admin@wingsfortruth.info](mailto:admin@wingsfortruth.info) if you wish to contact Robert.*

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### **Workers' Lists Including Noel Tanner**

[1974/1975](#)

[1979/1980](#)

[1982/1983](#)