

NTM Panama Historical Investigation Summary Report

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Theresa Sidebotham, IHART Coordinator October 5, 2016

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IHART wants to thank all who testified in this long and difficult investigation. For some allegations, we are fairly confident that we found the truth. For others, the truth is hidden in the fog of history and memory so that we could not be sure exactly what happened—the final truth will come out when God reveals the hidden things. The anonymous histories were shared with New Tribes Mission USA (NTM), and are being used to improve NTM’s child safety practices, leadership, and accountability.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE IHART INVESTIGATION

New Tribes Mission USA commissioned the Panama investigation for the following reasons:

- To understand the truth about what happened to children on the Panama field, knowing that this understanding would help keep other children safe;

- To value MKs and the suffering that many have endured by giving victims/survivors (V/S) an avenue to tell their story;
- To provide a means for counseling or other support services for any V/S who desire it;
- To remove any perpetrators who might still be current members from its midst and hold people accountable;
- To analyze organizational and leadership environments to identify possible root causes of how abuse occurred, and identify ways for NTM to improve organizationally;
- To comply with appropriate legal standards; and
- To make reports to law enforcement.

Some have asked why NTM has commissioned historical investigations when there is no legal obligation to do so, as well as whether it is a good use of mission resources. NTM's response is that its hope would be to accomplish as many of the above goals as possible, but more importantly, to allow these efforts to give every possible opportunity for the redemption of the past. NTM wants to make every effort to express to MKs that it values their lives, and NTM deeply regrets the suffering they have endured.

A historical investigation process cannot deal with the past once and for all. It may well be that not everyone has even yet told their story, and in many cases an investigation may not uncover the truth. The point of this process is to widen knowledge and understanding of what happened and to seek truth, justice, and reconciliation, not to achieve absolute answers.

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DEFINITIONS AND STANDARDS

The time frame investigated in this investigation was from 1962 to 2003. Abuse allegations received by IHART were of incidents that took place from 1977 to 1994.

Vocabulary Used

In the sensitive situation of an abuse investigation, not only are there many possible vocabulary terms, but different terms may be offensive to some, while others may prefer those terms. We explain the terms used by IHART and apologize for any terms that unintentionally make people uncomfortable, as this is not the desire of IHART.

Some persons who have suffered abusive behavior refer to themselves as a "victim." Others prefer the term "survivor." Here, we use V/S to encompass both terms.

Persons are "alleged offenders" (AO) until they are determined by a preponderance of the evidence to have met the standard for abuse or criminal activity. Then IHART calls them "offenders." But it is important to note that any status as offenders is not legally established—only that investigators have reached the point of "more likely than not" for an internal investigation.

Persons who have grown up on the mission field are often called Missionary Kids (MK) or Third Culture Kids (TCK). Some prefer the term "former MK" and others take the view that "once an MK, always an MK." For convenience, IHART uses the term "MK" throughout, but other terms are equally valid.

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Standards and Definitions for Child Abuse

I think it's valuable to identify the events and perpetrators from the past. But I think it is perhaps more significant to identify the environment that led to those events—an environment which created no accountability for adults, and denied a voice to children. . . . This is an abuse that needs to be recognized, because it is the common thread that runs underneath all forms of abuse. Whether or not someone takes the opportunity that environment affords to commit an act of physical or verbal abuse, the emotional damage of living in that controlling environment is still devastating. V/S

New Tribes Mission has patterned its abuse definitions after those set forth by the World Health Organization. In the time frame of the Panama allegations, which went up to the mid 1990s, NTM did not have specific definitions of abuse. Given that our cultural understandings of child abuse and appropriate child discipline have changed over the years, it is not appropriate for the investigative teams to use current definitions to evaluate events from decades ago as child abuse (primarily in the areas of physical and emotional abuse). The investigative teams seek to use culturally appropriate standards for abuse and discipline, as do the Recommendations Panels. This does not suggest in any way that V/S did not suffer pain from these actions, nor are we suggesting that no one should be held accountable for certain actions, only that it is not appropriate to hold people accountable under standards that did not exist at the time.

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The exception is the standard for sexual abuse, which has remained fairly consistent over time. NTM's current definition of child sexual abuse is:

“Child sexual abuse is evidenced by the involvement of a child in sexual activity by an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. Sexual abuse can include, but is not limited to verbal, visual, and/or physical behavior.”

However, definitions of normal physical affection are highly dependent on culture, and have changed in some ways over the years, and would shape what activity was considered sexual. Severely injuring a child has always been considered physical abuse. However, previous understanding of corporal punishment in many settings was that marks were acceptable. Severe beatings, extensive bruising, and breaking the skin would all have been considered abusive in previous decades.

For the purposes of this investigation, corporal punishment that would have been considered appropriate by USA church culture of the day is not synonymous with “causing injury.” We understand that spanking will cause pain, but because of the cultural acceptability of spanking at that time, pain does not equal injury for the purposes of this report.

Emotional abuse and spiritual abuse (which is considered as a form of emotional abuse) were not well-understood in previous decades. In previous times, such abuse would have had to be severe to trigger concerns. Not infrequently, IHART identified behavior that would be considered abusive today, but was likely not considered abusive at the time that it occurred.

When investigating, a team must work to a standard of evidence. These standards differ depending on the type of investigation. For instance, law enforcement investigations must generate evidence that can be proved beyond a reasonable doubt. This could be a very difficult

standard to meet in most historical investigations. However, if law enforcement does take action on any these reports, it will use that high standard.

Most non-criminal investigations determine whether there is a preponderance of the evidence that the allegations occurred. This means that it is more likely than not that the actions took place. In other words, the evidence gets to 51%. IHART uses this standard.

This means that even if a V/S's history is not found to be true by a preponderance of the evidence, IHART recognizes that it still may be true, to some percentage chance under 50%. And if someone is found to have offended by a preponderance of the evidence, IHART recognizes that the person still may be innocent, by some percentage chance under 50%.

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IHART INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

Overview of IHART's Commission

NTM USA commissioned an independent investigative process for the Panama field, or IHART, which stands for Independent Historical Allegations Review Team. IHART has the duty to receive and investigate allegations of child sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, find out the truth where possible and preserve confidentiality within defined parameters (for instance, law enforcement action may make full confidentiality impossible).

IHART's commission involves seeking truth and justice for both those who bring abuse allegations and those who are accused. IHART applies standards of due process that seek to protect the rights of all concerned. The IHART process seeks to:

- Conduct fully independent investigations using professional best practices;
- Assemble the findings into clear reports and deliver them to those closely involved and also appropriate NTM personnel.
- Recommend outcomes for individuals who violated either the law or the policies of NTM, as offenders or as leaders;
- Connect individuals who have been hurt with helping resources;
- Make reports to law enforcement as appropriate.

Role of Coordinator

The IHART Coordinator is responsible to appoint investigative teams, keep the investigation on track, communicate with NTM in requesting documents, give generalized reports to NTM about how the investigation is progressing, post public updates, handle budgetary matters, bring together a Panel, and coordinate all Master and Summary Reports. The IHART Coordinator does not generally perform interviews or make factual findings. Interviewing and making factual findings are the responsibility of the investigative teams. Because the IHART Coordinator out of necessity has some connection with NTM, she avoids interviewing and fact-finding, in part to keep that process independent. The investigative teams have no direct contact with NTM other than interviewing NTM personnel, members or former members as needed. This is structured to preserve their independence.

Role of Investigative Teams

IHART works with independent investigators who are professionals, trained in law enforcement or other government investigations. These investigators review extensive documents. They reach out to potential witnesses, including V/S, AO and leaders. They gather information and do

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interviews. They write summaries of these interviews, make factual findings, and create reports. They work independently, with some guidance and feedback from the IHART Coordinator. The investigators are sympathetic to the sufferings of the MKs and with their histories. But their primary function is to be impartial and seek the truth, neither assuming that an allegation is true nor that it is not true. It is necessary for the process to be fair and impartial if both V/S and AO are to receive justice.

Role of Panels

Once the IHART investigative team has generated a Report with factual findings, a Panel meets. The Panel is comprised of persons who have both mission field experience and professional credentials. The following types of experience are represented: cross-cultural experience; pastoral experience; counseling experience; leadership experience; missionary experience; and being an MK. A Panel is comprised of people who are impartial. They should have no bias towards either V/S or AO, and should have no direct connection with the fields or the individual investigations. Also, they have no current employment with NTM USA.

The Panel reviews the Master Report generated by the investigators and makes recommendation to the NTM USA Executive Board, which then uses these recommendations in making final administrative determinations.

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Confidentiality and Publicity Standards

The survivors own their stories. They and they alone, have the right to tell those stories if they choose. Parent

Both within the investigation and afterwards, IHART considers many questions about how to handle information.

Most V/S and many witnesses prefer not to reveal their identity. IHART takes care to keep confidential the names of those alleging abuse, as that is part of its commission from NTM. The names of those who report abuse, any interview notes, documents received or created, and all contact information are held by the particular investigative team reviewing that situation. Access to this information is only available to those team members, their team leader, and the IHART Coordinator and IHART staff. Any information necessary to report abuse to the authorities will be used for that purpose. The IHART Coordinator and all those involved in the investigation are specifically tasked with preserving confidentiality. At the end of the investigation, this material is carefully stored at a location independent of NTM.

There are those V/S who want their history personally acknowledged as part of the healing process. This is the individual's choice, not the choice of NTM or IHART. This choice may also change at different points in the individual's personal journey, and this should be respected.

NTM stands ready to receive these personal histories and to have personal meetings, if that is desired. NTM offers this in its individual apology letters.

While confidentiality plays a vital role for some V/S individuals in helping them feel safe to come forward, keeping V/S and witness names confidential also weakens the investigation.

Because these names should not be revealed to alleged offenders and alleged culpable leaders, it is not always possible to question people thoroughly about certain situations, and it is harder to establish certain facts. This reflects another difference between an internal investigation and a criminal investigation. In an internal investigation, the confidentiality of V/S and witnesses is hugely important, while in a criminal investigation the effort toward confidentiality is not considered except in regard to the public not knowing the names of current minors.

Confidentiality is handled differently in the case of those found to be offenders and in the case of leaders. For these persons, NTM is informed of the names so that it can take appropriate action, and can maintain a personnel record. The IHART process is not a legal action or part of the criminal justice system, and so personal information about offenders and leaders will not be shared broadly. Because of the standard of preponderance of the evidence, IHART cannot fully establish guilt. Broad sharing is less appropriate where there have been no legal proceedings, as we cannot state that actions are fully established when there has been no judicial process.

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These different confidentiality concerns and rights explain in part why IHART does not share stories in full detail, but only summarizes the overall investigation and its findings. However, at certain points in the report, IHART has used anonymous quotes from those interviewed that seem to capture the views of many in a poignant way.

Several strains of thought exist even within the NTM MK community about how broadly the investigations should be discussed, and IHART has heard a number of perspectives. One community of MKs who have suffered has a deep suspicion and mistrust that NTM will “cover up” abuse. This community’s desire is to see the entire situation handled with full transparency, and with broad acknowledgement of any allegations. This community would generally prefer to see alleged perpetrators and leaders publicly named and shamed.

A second community has had different and more positive experiences and memories. While generally supportive of the first group, this community has expressed frustration at having its MK experience denied and marginalized as inauthentic, and having its more positive voice shut down in the MK groups. Many of those who are accused of abuse by the first community are seen as loving authority figures by the second community. Some in this second group flatly deny the allegations made against certain individuals, and believe this is injustice and that the allegations are false.

A third community acknowledges that abuse happened and that adults in authority committed wrongs. With certain exceptions for more serious abuse, this community takes the perspective that people erred and sinned according to their spiritual maturity and the knowledge base of the time. This group believes that, while serious wrongs should be dealt with, given the changing societal norms of acceptable behavior, the past was not perfect and cannot be made to be so.

Honest, heartfelt apologies and reconciliation from adults concerned are viable options for this group.

At least one more community exists of those who believe there is not much use in rehashing the past; holding that the investigation is an intrusion on their privacy and the privacy of others, and it is better to move on.

Some MKs are in pain because of their own stories; some for the sufferings of other MKs; and some because someone dear to the MK has been accused of abusing children, in some instances falsely or with a level of evidence that they believe is unconvincing. These strains of thought, and probably others, have appeared at different points in the IHART investigative process—at times even in relation to the same individuals.

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These different perspectives do not determine NTM's response to findings of abuse, which is set by Board policy and Panel determinations. However, they are reflected in IHART's choices about what to reveal. Each community of MKs deserves to be treated with respect by IHART. This is in part why IHART has chosen to provide a Summary Report that gives a fairly in-depth perspective, without sharing personal information.

Required Participation for Members

New Tribes Mission expects members to participate in the investigative process, as needed.

Refusal to participate may lead to administrative action up to dismissal. This applies to alleged offenders and to leadership, but does not apply to those who may be V/S, since V/S always have the choice whether or not to share their history.

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PROCESS OF PANAMA INVESTIGATION

The Panama investigation took place in two main stages, and much valuable information was gathered in each stage, all of which IHART relied on for its conclusions.

First Stage of Investigation

Pat Hendrix led the IHART process as Coordinator, and indeed, was greatly instrumental in designing the IHART process. She served throughout the first stage of this investigation, and concluded her time as Coordinator after the first Panel, which reviewed findings and made recommendation about alleged offenders and abuse.

The first stage of the investigation began in January of 2012. At the beginning of the IHART process, the Coordinator appointed an investigative team from Professional Investigators International (Pii). The investigators received reports from individuals.

IHART gathered massive amounts of documents. To gather documents, the IHART Coordinator asked NTM for information on members and former members from Panama during the time frame being investigated. NTM was not informed of the specific reason for these requests. NTM further safeguarded IHART's independence by having a few designated individuals, who are committed to confidentiality, handle all such requests.

Records reviewed included correspondence, rules, personnel history, timelines, reporting documents, interview notes, and policies. These documents came from multiple locations.

During the first stage of the investigation, the Pii investigators collected information regarding 252 people, and interviewed 188 people. The team reached out to a broad number of Panama MKs and other potential witnesses from the Panama Field. The investigators attempted to locate and interview as many as possible of the former students (a total of approximately 295) of Escuela Hogar Misionero (EHM) at Chepo and Chame. The team interviewed those reporting abuse and others, as well as alleged offenders where they were still alive and willing to be interviewed. The team also interviewed former school administrators and faculty, parents, dorm parents, field committee and school committee members.

Many who were contacted chose to be interviewed, and others declined. IHART expresses gratitude to those who chose to be interviewed and respects the privacy of those V/S who chose to decline. Clearly, if the person declines to be interviewed, the person loses their chance to have information regarding their perspective or knowledge included in the reports.

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Pii did hundreds of hours of interviews and gathered thousands of pages of information. Pii took all this information and drafted a Master Report. This Master Report made findings about abuse allegations and alleged offenders as best as could be determined. Then all names of those alleging abuse and other witnesses were coded in the Master Report. Pii made some generalized observations about leaders, but explained that in its understanding, a report on leadership culpability was not part of the original scope. This was a different understanding from that of the then IHART Coordinator. Pii stated on October 1, 2014, "Investigating individual culpability is both outside of the scope of Pii's contract and would require 15 to 20 new investigations." The coded Report was provided to the Panel and to the Executive Board. (Interview notes or other supporting material or identifying material are not provided to NTM, per IHART policy and NTM instruction.)

Panels for AO Culpability

A Recommendations Panel met to review the Master Report that was compiled by Pii, and make recommendations to the NTM USA Executive Board. Panel Recommendations were then sent to the EB.

After the first Panel met, it was discovered that one Panel member had a close connection to the investigation of one AO. Failure to disclose this connection was apparently inadvertent, and no

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actual bias was established. But because best practices require that IHART avoid the appearance of bias, the recommendation of the Panel was stricken pertaining to that one AO. A second Panel met and evaluated that single report.

Second, or Leadership Culpability Stage

Around the time it was discovered that there would need to be a second stage to this investigation, Theresa Sidebotham was appointed as the IHART Coordinator. IHART's normal procedure is that leadership culpability is a formal part of the investigation and Master Report. Since this did not happen due to the misunderstanding, a second stage of the investigation was necessary to determine leadership culpability. A second investigative team was appointed, which built on the foundation of the first stage, but carried out the formal leadership investigation. The

second investigative team interviewed 24 additional people. Some people were, out of necessity, interviewed twice, and IHART especially thanks these individuals for their patience in repeating this difficult experience.

The second investigative team generated a Master Report specifically on leadership culpability. Again, the names of those alleging abuse and witnesses were coded, and the Report was provided to a Recommendations Panel and the NTM USA Executive Board.

Leadership Culpability Panel

The Recommendations Panel formed to evaluate leadership issues met to review the Master Report and make recommendations to the NTM Executive Board. Again, the Panel Recommendations were provided to the NTM USA EB.

Actions of the Executive Board

The EB accepted all Recommendations that fell within the scope of NTM USA policy from each of the three Panels. It also accepted certain of the additional recommendations, though certain recommendations were not considered feasible. Each of those Panels is to be informed of the recommendations accepted or considered unfeasible. The EB created a letter of notice with outcomes clearly stated for each identified offender or leader with identified culpability.

Statement of Findings and Summary Report

The Statements of Findings were prepared, based on the Master Reports, for all those who alleged abuse and all those who were accused of abuse or leadership culpability. Packets were prepared for each of these people, including an apology letter from NTM for V/S, and an administrative outcome letter from the EB for identified offenders or culpable leaders.

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Because of the scope of the investigation, and because allegations may be ambiguous at times, it is possible that a V/S could have been inadvertently missed in this final process. If anyone feels that is the case, please immediately let the IHART Coordinator know at contact@ihart.care. After known V/S, AOs, and leaders are sent their information packets, and there has been a reasonable time for delivery, the Summary Report will be provided to NTM USA members and made available to interested persons via the ihart.care website.

The material gathered for the two parts of the investigation will be collected by the IHART Coordinator and archived appropriately at a designated legal firm.

Reports to Authorities

After meeting and discussing the reporting situation with law enforcement in Sanford, Florida in April of 2012, the IHART team agreed to report allegations of abuse by registered letter. This was done during the first phase of the investigation, and involved 29 reports. Reports were made on allegations even when the standard of preponderance had not been met. An allegation that seemed credible on its face resulted in a report.

As part of finishing the investigation, IHART did a final review of reports to authorities already accomplished and additional reports were made as necessary. IHART is aware of no responses by authorities.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR INVESTIGATION

Overview of Timeline

1962 School at Chepo, Panama opens

1972 School at Chame, Panama opens

1974 All grades at Chame

1977-78 Time frame for occurrence of first abuse allegation¹

1993-94 Time frame for occurrence of last abuse allegation

1996 Official discipline policy developed for the school and dorms in Panama 2006 School at Chame closes

The school at Chepo was originally for elementary, while the upper grades were at Chame. Eventually, all grades were combined at Chame. During the history of the school, there were close to 300 students.

Understanding of Child Abuse in a Historical Context

In the decades before the 1990s, child abuse was poorly understood by government institutions, mission agencies, and others. Society as a whole, including mission organizations, failed previous generations of children by not understanding the prevalence of child abuse or its damaging effects. NTM, like other organizations, had a limited understanding of child abuse at that time. Other additional issues for NTM were high staff turnover, lack of adequate training and supervision, an attitude of putting ministry first, poor management of difficult people, and childcare modeled on a system of elite boarding schools that originally developed in the UK. With greater research and understanding, child protection standards have changed greatly and become much more stringent. Organizations are doing better at understanding organizational responsibility for keeping children safe, and putting plans into place both for prevention and for reporting and dealing with issues.

An investigation of historical abuse involves a look into the past. Abuse was often widespread, and was very little understood. This lack of understanding on the part of many allowed

¹ Note that this is the time frame for the abuse happening, not the time frame in which the abuse was reported. Very little abuse was reported contemporaneously. Most abuse was not reported until the IHART investigation.

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perpetrators great freedom to act. In addition, standards of behavior have changed. Harsh physical discipline or harsh verbal interaction that were not considered abusive in the past are quite unacceptable today. This created a situation where persons engaging in behavior were not held accountable, and great pain was suffered without much awareness by responsible adults. Most of the reports for this investigation were significantly delayed, sometimes for decades until this investigation started (and we believe some have never reported). It is important to understand that this delay is normal, particularly where the V/S is young and the offenders were in a position of trust or authority. Delay is normal and is actually more likely where the abuse is more serious. While delay often makes it difficult to gather sufficient evidence to reach a finding by the preponderance of the evidence, in and of itself, delay does not have a bearing on the truthfulness of the report.

Much institutional harm to children or inappropriate personal interactions did not then and may not now fall into the category of criminal child abuse. Where the IHART process did not make a

finding that the behavior would have met standards of child abuse, it does not mean that IHART approves the behavior or that NTM approves the behavior. When people were harsh or unkind to lonely and powerless children, it increased the children's sense of abandonment and caused wounds that in many cases linger to this day. The behavior can still be wrong even if it did not fit the definitions of child abuse at that time (or perhaps even now).

Difficulties of Historical Investigation

Unfortunately, in a historical investigation, it is not always possible to establish facts definitively. After so much time, witnesses or documents may be unavailable, or memories may have faded. While it is natural that MKs would support each other through these difficult experiences, discussing events affects an investigation. Research shows that such discussion creates significant social contamination that affects the credibility of the testimony.² Some abuse memories are recovered much later. This does not mean they are untrue, or that the person is lying (which is rare in abuse investigations). Yet because of significant scientific challenges to recovered memories,

² Bright-Paul, A., Jarrold C., Wright, D. B., & Guillaume S. (2012). Children's memory distortions following social contact with a co-witness: Disentangling social and cognitive mechanisms. *Memory* 20(6), 580-595. doi: 10.1080/09658211.2012.690039.

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best practices require that recovered memories be supported by other corroborating evidence. This evidence was not always available. While certain behaviors could not be substantiated by a preponderance of the evidence so long after the event, this does not establish that the behaviors did not happen. Nor does it mean that IHART is minimizing the emotional suffering of those who testified.

Early NTM Organizational Culture and Panama Leadership

We can't go on hurting people like this. Let's stop and take a serious look at our system and really ask God to open our eyes to the root cause. Executive Committee, 1997

When I was in Panama in [the 1980s] the campus was like a prison... By... 2000 there was SUCH a different feel to the school—both the dorms and the school. . . . The entire campus was such an open, welcoming environment. V/S

NTM was established shortly after World War II. The military influence popular at that time was apparent in early mission terminology, such as calling missionary training “boot camp” and arranging for it to be a rigorous experience. NTM initially had a hierarchical leadership structure. NTM was distinguished from other missions at the time in that it would take missionaries without advanced academic degrees. Indeed, there may have been a preference for NTM training over having advanced degrees, particularly those from secular institutions. An advantage of this approach was that people of many different backgrounds were able to serve on the field and NTM was not elitist. A disadvantage of this approach is that NTM in the early days had less access to contemporaneous scholarship on psychology, child development, education, or leadership than those groups with more rigorous academic standards.

Prior to 2007, the NTM Executive Committee was the central leadership team for all members and ministries worldwide. This team regularly met in Sanford, Florida, which was the NTM International Headquarters. Each field was governed by a Field Committee, which in Panama was normally comprised of three people. Typically, for a school, there was a school committee. The school committee's authority was not always well-established. Dorm parents could have been responsible to the school committee or to a dorm coordinator or directly to the Field Committee. The actual chain of command was not always easy to determine in retrospect, and even the existence of the school committee was ambiguous from the documentation available to us now.

NTM theology was very conservative, towards the fundamentalist side of evangelicalism. As was common in that era, this tended towards a legalistic approach. The Field Committee had enormous amounts of power, as it was not specified when it needed to inform the Executive Committee in the U.S. of its actions. Because the Field Committee often selected its own members and replacements, and had on-the-job training, the Committee tended to be made up of

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men with similar viewpoints and leadership styles. The Panama Field was made up of full-time and part-time Field Committee members. The full-time members included the chairman and others who were based near the office in the city of Chame, Panama. The part-time members often lived in rural or tribal locations and would travel to meet with the full committee for major issues as well as for quarterly meetings. Each leadership team (Executive Committee and Field Committee) had a chairman, but significant decisions were made by plurality, or consensus among the committee members. However, it was not at all clear at any given time which Field Committee members were involved in making particular decisions, or how much input they had. There was a strong perception that the Field Committee operated as a “good ol’ boys’ club” and had favorites, leading to inconsistent disciplinary actions. Whether this was true or not, because of the strong hierarchical structure, missionaries did not appear to feel free to share problems with the Field Committee. There were complaints about the Field Committee being controlling or legalistic or intimidating, and of behavior perhaps amounting to spiritual abuse. Some described the leadership atmosphere as being like a cult. This problem varied according to different leadership teams being in place at various times, as the investigation covered a span of years.

Supervision by the Executive Committee was sporadic. Communication in the early days was inconsistent and unreliable due to limited (and expensive) telephone access and the slow postal system in Panama and internationally.

Tribal work—planting churches and Bible translation—was seen as the most crucial and important work. Administrative work, or work at the missionary boarding school as a teacher or dorm parent, was often seen as secondary, to be accomplished by those who did not have the gifts to do tribal work. This meant that adults working at the school were sometimes insufficiently trained or talented, and were sometimes embittered with their assignment. Some commented that people who failed at everything else were then put in charge of the children—that only those who could not do tribal mission work went to support roles. In addition, few of

the teachers or dorm parents had received any formal training for their roles, or possessed degrees in education or child development. This led to situations such as a child with undiagnosed ADHD being tied to his chair. But the situation was not all dark—MKs agree that there were also some great teachers and dorm parents, and that most students were well-prepared for their continuing education.

There were indications that in the mission culture, people may have kept silent rather than reporting to leadership because they did not trust leadership. In addition, there was testimony that what happened at the school among the school staff was kept “well buried” so that the rest of the field did not know, including the Field Committee. In many cases, MKs assumed and even testified that field leadership must have known what was going on, but IHART was not usually able to corroborate these assumptions.

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An Internal Revolution—Grace Rediscovered

In the 1990s, NTM experienced a leadership change that some called “the Revolution” or “Grace Rediscovered.” At that time, there was a conscious effort to turn away from an authoritarian leadership style. NTM had conducted a survey of its members, which revealed a number of leadership problems within the mission. In January of 1997, the Executive Committee sent out a letter to all NTM missionaries.

This letter confirmed the survey results and outlined a number of problems with NTM leadership. Many of these problems were similar to ones that MKs complained of in the IHART investigation, and which created an atmosphere that allowed abuse to take place.

They included:

- Paternalism and failure to respect people;
- Failure to value previous experience or education;
- Questioning others’ commitment to Christ;
- Reacting defensively to questioning and accusing questioners of “rebellion”;
- Having to be in control and emphasizing “submission”;
- A negative emphasis towards people, creating fear and suspicion.

The letter went on to say in part:³

We want you dear missionaries to know that we, the men of the Executive Committee, take responsibility for this problem that we have described above. We have been wrong in practicing a leadership style like this. We have produced a system of legalism and negativism in our training and on our fields. Up until now, we have not sensed the gravity of the problem to the place where we would say, “We can’t go on hurting people like this. Let’s stop and take a serious look at our system and really ask God to open our eyes to the root cause.”

....

We would like to ask you, personally and individually, to forgive us for how we have hurt you directly or indirectly, through the autocratic system that we have practiced. Please pray for us that we will see and acknowledge all that God wants to show us.

³The full letter is posted on ihart.care.

While institutional change takes time, many within NTM believe today that this was the turn of the tide, and that NTM is a different organization from what it was then. We note that the abuse allegations brought forth about the Panama field all predated this letter. Whether or not it is causally related, it is also around this time that NTM instituted child safety policies for the first time. These child safety policies have been continually updated and improved over the intervening years.

Later Changes in Leadership Structure within NTM

After 2007, global leadership for NTM was decentralized and the NTM Executive Committee was dissolved. The NTM USA Executive Board was formed, largely with different members, but after this date had responsibility for NTM USA only.

The new structure for NTM worldwide is a Global Ministry Agreement that governs the working together of various partner entities. NTM USA does not control any of the other entities. This approach is more respectful of international sovereignty and the independence of national churches. However, it can make it more difficult to enforce policies, such as those related to Child Protection. Enforcing Child Protection policies internationally is an ongoing effort, but all member entities of the re-organized NTM must have a child safety policy and procedures in place for their individual country.

Historical Political Situation in Panama

So, we were in a kind of a precarious position there of trying to always work things culturally and we didn't let the children know the violence that was going on . . . We saw . . . people shot in the streets. Principal of EHM

The political situation in Panama during the 1980s was volatile and dangerous, culminating in an invasion by the United States in 1990. General Manuel Noriega was commander of the Panama Defense Force (PDF), which also acted as law enforcement. Noriega was involved with drug-running and other unsavory activity. Noriega took over the country against the will of the people. He declared war against the United States. The United States responded by invading Panama (Operation Just Cause) to protect the lives of U.S. citizens (35,000 of whom were living in Panama, largely in the former Canal Zone), to combat drug trafficking, and protect the Panama Canal treaties. Noriega was removed from power in January 1990.

The political climate in Panama was a contributing factor to the perspective of many NTM missionaries/interviewees living in Panama at the time. The former NTM leaders in Panama cited an anti-American sentiment during the Noriega regime. The consequence of this cross-cultural tension included missionary leaders not being able to rely on Panamanian police to assist Americans in seeking justice for crimes committed against missionaries. During this period from the late 70s to the early 1990s, there was considerable violence in Panama, with the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) assaulting and threatening people. Foreigners were particularly at risk. Even for U.S. military dependents, encounters with the PDF were frightening. Stories from missionaries and MKs show a high level of fear and tension. Some missionaries were deported. Others were protected by people with whom they had formed good relationships. Some

missionaries were evacuated from certain areas. Some missionaries were robbed in a violent way. Some were accused of being CIA. Families were worried and dorm parents were also worried, because of the potential that the children could be hostages or have to evacuate. Indeed, in 1993, three NTM missionaries were kidnapped and ultimately killed. One missionary with training as a counselor commented that missionaries frequently suffered from burnout or post-traumatic stress. Many NTM missionaries at the time were frightened because it was dangerous for Americans to come to the attention of Panamanian authorities. As a result, they were unlikely to make reports to the local authorities, whom they did not trust, such as in a case of an MK's teenage pregnancy by a young Panamanian man.

School leaders were under particular pressure, because they had the added responsibility of keeping the children safe and not traumatizing the children by sharing what was going on.

School leaders were interrogated at times, or threatened by local thugs.

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Historical Child Safety Considerations in Panama

(Speaking of the tribal culture and what could potentially happen to a child) You may already know this ... but children started having sex when they're five, six years old. So, have your little daughter there and, so, the boys are, are using her when she's five, six, seven years old ... Staff There was an expectation in NTM at the time that missionaries had to make sacrifices for the work of the mission, and that sacrifice involved sending missionary children out of the tribal locations to live at the missionary boarding school (EHM School). Interviewees described the tribal people as overtly sexual, and said MKs that stayed in the tribe would be exposed to immoral behavior, including promiscuity, child sexual abuse, and tribal girls being married at a young age. Indeed, interviews from MKs whose parents lived in tribal areas confirm this view of sexuality, as much of the alleged sexual abuse took place in the tribal locations and not at the school.

Home schooling was very limited at the time due to lack of training and curriculum materials (the Internet was not accessible in the tribal areas at the time, and the homeschooling movement had not gotten underway). For these reasons, NTM essentially required missionaries to send their children to live at the missionary boarding school in Chepo, Panama, which eventually consolidated in Chame, Panama. Missionary parents generally trusted the individuals who were appointed to teach and care for the children. Missionary parents and former dorm parents who were interviewed could not recall the existence of a policy handbook about child safety prior to the 1990s. Parents did not usually remember speaking with the school staff or dorm parents prior to the start of the school year about their expectations for the way they wanted their children treated or disciplined at the school.

When asked if children would have known how to report inappropriate behavior or abuse at the time, some interviewees stated the children would have been able to speak to their dorm parents or teachers. When asked what the children could do if the dorm parent or teacher was the offender, interviewees stated some children might choose not to report the inappropriate or abusive behavior. In some ways, the dorm parents worked against good relationships between children and parents, perhaps inadvertently, with action like censoring letters or by reporting to

the parents all the children's "sins" at the time of their reunion with their parents, such as at the end of a school term.

Many children at the time would have been hesitant to tell their parents or other missionary leaders because they would not want to distract their parents from their missionary work of saving lost souls. Although it was rarely stated explicitly, many children seemed to have had the perception that they were responsible for keeping their parents on the field. Reporting of abuse could cause the parents to choose to leave the field, or possibly to be kicked off if they made a fuss. In addition, children testified that their letters to their parents were usually read before they went out. Finally, some of the children were fearful of retaliation if they told.

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In addition, adults at that time knew less about what to ask or look for. In the time frame of the allegations in question, the understanding of child sexual abuse was not well developed, even in the United States, as it was, unbelievably to us at this time, considered rare and not harmful. It was often not recognized, even within the general culture.⁴ NTM was a fundamentalist mission and the topic of sex was often considered taboo, and so was less likely to have been discussed.

Early Years of Child Safety Policies Within NTM

In the early years, like most organizations, NTM lacked child safety policies. It began addressing child safety issues in the 1980s, and continued evolving its policies in the 1990s.

In the mid-1990s, Scott Ross, legal counsel at NTM headquarters, instigated the formation of a Child Protection Committee and child protection policy. He was instrumental in helping form the inter-mission Child Safety and Protection Network and created a series of training programs to aid NTM missionaries' understanding of child abuse. While early steps were not without their shortcomings, Ross was a pioneer in the Evangelical missionary context in regard to improving child safety and protection.

⁴ Monica Applewhite, Ph.D., "Development of Organizational Standards of Care for Prevention and Response to Child Sexual Abuse : A Historical Analysis Using Research, Organizational and Public Policy Benchmarks," pp. 5-6.

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It appears that the earliest guideline document for Panama came out in 1994. It was called "Guidelines on Spanking, Physical, and Sexual Abuse," and was based on information provided at the Latin American Leadership Conference. At that time, the Field Committee in Panama provided copies to the missionaries.

In the early years, any discipline policy at EHM was unwritten. This created the opportunity for excesses. In Panama in 1996, EHM provided material on Classroom Discipline and Management and a Discipline Policy for Schools and Dorms. At that time, limitations on spankings were clearly described. Spanking was to be reserved for major offenses in the cases of younger children, and involved spanking a fully-dressed child on the buttocks with a paddle. If necessary to give a spanking, guidelines were to be followed. Records were to be made of any spankings, and parents were to be notified. Guidelines were:

(1) two adults present, at least one of the same gender as the child; (2) female faculty member must spank female student;

- (3) offense reviewed with child;
- (4) spanking be close in time to the offense;
- (5) child was to remain fully clothed;
- (6) spanking be on buttocks with designated paddle; (7) maximum of 3 swats;
- (8) no physical restraint;
- (9) appropriate follow-up discussion;
- (10) complete records kept;
- (11) notification of parents.

Other corrective actions were also described, such as withholding allowances, extra chores, and going to bed early. As time went by, the policy at EHM evolved to no corporal punishment at all. For serious offenses, parents would be called out of the tribe.

These NTM child safety policies were neither significantly ahead of the general understanding in the culture, nor were they behind. Our culture's understanding of child safety issues has changed considerably since that time, and continues to grow and change. NTM makes significant efforts to stay current.

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Boarding School Culture

being torn away from your parents, just doesn't seem right to me . . . V/S

10 years ago . . .the doctors used to tell you to put a . . . baby . . . face down. Because they were worried that the baby would throw up and, and choke on its vomit and die. And so the loving thing to do at that point was to lay your baby face down. Well, the research came out and showed that's not the right way to take care of a baby. Because they're suffocating, you need to to put them on their back. . . . And I feel like that's what's going on with boarding schools. At one time research and people believed that that was what was best for their kids. And my parents, I do think, put me in boarding school because they believed that was what was best for us. And . . . now people are saying that that's not true. V/S

Boarding schools evolved out of the British tradition, which dated back to medieval times.

During the colonial period of the British Empire, children were sent home from India and other countries to boarding schools for health and educational reasons. In addition, the British upper class commonly sent children to elite boarding schools, a tradition that continues today.

Boarding school was thus seen as a high-end option, the educational choice of privileged classes.

As time went by, mission and colonial agencies founded boarding schools in host countries, so that the children could be closer to parents. Instead of seeing parents once in several years, children would see their parents several times a year. This was seen as an educational and

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personal advancement. During the early twentieth century, it was believed that children got a good education and did well in these settings.

However, there were drawbacks for boarding schools that were not on the radar for missions at the time. Many children felt abandoned by parents. Some never were able to establish close family relationships. Families could not know what was happening in boarding schools in a day-to-day basis, and a harsh or even abusive environment sometimes prevailed.

In the decades pertaining to the IHART investigation, NTM put considerable pressure on the missionaries to put their children in boarding schools. NTM practice was that children were required to go to boarding school, and very few families fought this—or were successful if they tried. This same boarding school practice was common to many major missions. NTM and other missions developed this practice for several reasons. One is that the culture in the tribes often included much sexual behavior that was abusive or inappropriate, and children were taken out of the tribe to protect them from sexual abuse or explicit knowledge. Few parents had the educational background or resources to homeschool, as materials were not readily available at the time to do so. Successful homeschooling in that day took a level of brilliance and effort that was almost prohibitive. Further, it was thought important that children have the society of and socialize with other children. A final and important reason is that the mission wanted both parents contributing fully to mission work. As it played out, this conveyed the message to children that ministry was more important than they were. This last reason in particular has caused great resentment in many MKs, who believe that they were deprived of their childhood and abandoned by their parents because of this philosophy.

Boarding schools were problematic in ways that were not well understood in that era, by NTM or by other missions. First, few understood the deep sense of abandonment experienced by many children. What made it much worse was that children went to boarding school at age 6 (or occasionally younger). Most if not all of these children were not mature enough to be separated from their parents. Many MKs explained that taking children from their parents at a young age was traumatizing. One stated,

When you rip kids away from their parents at a young age and you throw ‘em with a bunch of other people that they don’t even know, that could be a form of neglect or abuse, even though it wasn’t intended maybe to be that way, but it’s very emotionally traumatizing for children to be removed from their parents when they’re at a young age like that. So I had a really hard time when they put me in the dorm. . . . being torn away from your parents, just doesn’t seem right to me. (Vocalized pauses removed).

Modern theories of child development agree that taking children away from parents at a young age for boarding school can be harmful, though we have seen no scholarship that categorizes it as

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neglect or abuse. While the failure of many mission organizations in understanding normal child development and needs was due to ignorance and boarding school life has never been classified as abusive per se, the level of pain that these early separations caused is difficult to over-estimate.

While adult MKs relate that NTM’s schools were educationally effective, the schools were not emotionally healthy for many children. In fairness, the boarding school situation was always complex. Some MKs did well and really enjoyed the environment. Others have mixed feelings, valuing the fun and enriching opportunities, but identifying inappropriate behaviors and sources of pain. For others, the experience was filled with torment. These different reactions were caused by a complicated mix of the individual temperament of the child and the particular adults who

had the most impact on the child's life. At times, in the histories told to IHART, different teachers and dorm parents are almost unrecognizable as the same person from one MK's account to the next.

Certain issues were particularly difficult for children in boarding schools. Children wrote regularly to their parents. However, dorm parents often read the letters and sometimes censored them, under the theory that unhappy letters from children would make it harder for parents to keep doing God's work and distract them from the ministry.

Whether intentionally or not, MKs were put under a great deal of pressure to be strong and courageous in being away from their parents so that parents could share the gospel with people and keep them from going to hell. Often, this was not stated explicitly, but the children had an "understanding" that this was the case. In the children's minds, this created an environment where they would not or could not talk about problems in the boarding school environment. An unusual number of children wet their beds, sometimes for years, which quite likely had psychological origins. Some of the dorm parents reacted harshly to this, creating public humiliation, or even spankings for the bed-wetters. Because of the workload created, children usually had to change their own sheets, which many remember as humiliating.

Some also testified that the dorm parents were those who were unsuccessful in other areas of mission service. Teachers and dorm parents in those decades received little training, and did not necessarily have educational backgrounds for caring for and teaching children. In many ways, teachers and dorm parents were inadequately trained in basic child care principles. For instance, one child broke a foot jumping out of a tree. A staff person put a heavy, home-made cement cast on the child's leg, which was extremely heavy and potentially dangerous to the child because of the lye in the cement, which could have burned the child's skin. When the child's dorm parent saw it, he was livid. He took the child to the hospital and had an X-ray done and a proper cast put on. But this home remedy illustrates the lack of training.

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Some teachers and dorm parents were gifted with children, were wonderful, and were well-loved by the children. But in other cases, the adult personalities were not suitable to working with children, and they did not appear to love children. Some adults were cold and emotionally unavailable, some were harsh, and some crossed the line into actual abuse. Because school and field leadership also did not have adequate training or even awareness of what they should be looking for, harsh or abusive environments were often not corrected. In some cases, harsh adults also succeeded in entrenching their power within the leadership structure.

Adequate reporting structures did not exist in boarding schools, in part because children and parents were not encouraged to complain and were not always believed if they did complain. Because of the MKs' lack of communication with parents, the parents often did not know what was going on. If parents did know, the problems in leadership structure could make complaining risky.

In later years, the major missions, including NTM USA, came to understand that boarding school could be detrimental to children, and ceased making it a requirement.

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PANAMA INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS

NTM USA initially commissioned the Panama Field investigation due to an allegation made by an MK who had attended EHM in Panama. The student, who was 10 at the time, committed a minor infraction of the rules. A staff person beat this student bloody, with a weighted fishing rod. The student's parents were actually staying near the school at the time. The parents discovered the injuries when the student could not sit down for dinner. His father confronted the erring staff person, but took no formal action. This student has remembered the pain and humiliation of this incident through the years and reported the incident to the IHART team.

The IHART investigation covered the time frame from when Chepo opened in 1962 to 2003, though the last allegations stemmed from incidents in the 1990s.

Summary of Allegations and Findings

Pii reported that there were 103 credible allegations that were investigated. This is the number of allegations, not 103 separate people, because a student was counted more than once if he or she made multiple allegations, or allegations against a different AO. Pii investigated 57 allegations of physical abuse, 40 allegations of sexual abuse, and 8 separate allegations of emotional abuse that were unrelated to sexual or physical abuse.⁵

⁵ We realize this adds up to 105, so possibly some overlap exists. 28

Of these allegations, Pii found that 63 allegations rose to at least the level of preponderance of the evidence, and 40 did not. There were findings on five allegations of sexual abuse, if inappropriate behavior is included.

Pii found 10 AOs to be offenders by a preponderance of the evidence, though two of these were minors (MKs) at the time. Pii did not find preponderance of the evidence on another 10 AOs, including five who were minors (MKs) at the time.

In addition, the leadership investigation found various degrees of culpability on 9 leaders, ranging in degrees from serious failure to protect the safety of children to insufficient participation and support of the IHART investigation. While IHART was not able to make more specific findings on individual leadership failures, this Report highlights many ways in which there was collective leadership failure.

For the ones where preponderance was not reached, it does not confirm that the abuse never happened, but that the investigators could not determine that it did happen to a level of preponderance of the evidence. A finding of failure to reach preponderance of the evidence is not intended to diminish any person's history, but acknowledges that the truth is sometimes not accessible in investigations, especially historical investigations. And on the other hand, if preponderance was reached, it does not confirm that the person was guilty, but that the investigative team confirmed the allegation to a level of at least preponderance of the evidence.

Summary of NTM Actions Taken

For the 19 individuals found with culpability in the investigation, the following actions were taken by NTM following Panel recommendations tailored to the level of offense found.

Twelve individuals had actions that were determined to be at a level that required dismissal by NTM policy standards.

- o Current members with findings at this level were dismissed.
 - o Most of these individuals were not current members of NTM, and their permanent records at NTM were amended to “dismissed.”
 - o Two of the individuals were minors at the time of the offenses and did not receive dismissal notices since they were never employed by NTM. They were reported to the authorities along with the others.
 - o One of the group was deceased and no notice of findings was prepared.
- Seven individuals were found with levels of culpability that required action, though less than dismissal.

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- o Some individuals were reprimanded for various levels of failure to follow NTM policy or for their direct actions which, though not covered directly by policy, were not in the best interest of the safety and well-being of children.
- o Some individuals were reprimanded for failure to be proactive in protecting children. It is understood that historically, the understanding of child safety was not as well understood as it is today, but nevertheless, NTM felt that certain individuals should have been more proactive in their efforts.
- o A few individuals were reprimanded for failure to cooperate with investigators during their interview. None of these were found to have actions that rose to the preponderance of the evidence against minors or in other areas of policy violation; nevertheless, failure to cooperate is against NTM policy.

Historical Child Abuse Allegations in Panama

Since this all started, I have cried a lot more and the pain has surfaced. So hard... we were so unloved. V/S

These are the allegations of child abuse in the Panama field, many of which were corroborated. Without revealing the identity of individuals, the histories of the V/S should be heard.

Allegations of Physical Abuse

He had a . . . fishing pole, the end, uh, he used to beat some kids with the fishing pole ‘til they were bleeding. V/S

By far the greatest number of allegations in the Panama field were of physical abuse, primarily corporal punishment. Teachers and dorm parents at EHM spanked frequently, and corporal punishment was considered to be the godly way of disciplining children. In theory, spankings

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would be a few strokes with a small paddle, and would not break the skin or bruise the child. Usually paddles were used, and sometimes a yard stick. It seems fairly established that often discipline was excessive.

While some dorm parents really loved the kids, others apparently did not, and the children sensed it and reacted to that environment. For many MKs, it was not specifically the spankings or the rules that hurt them, but the sense of being abandoned by their parents and not being loved by their dorm parents and teachers.

During the era of the allegations, most personnel approved of spanking and thought it was necessary for biblical discipline. However, there was general acknowledgment that certain staff spanked hard. Allegations were made against some dorm parents for regularly and frequently giving vicious spankings that left marks, or for enjoying spanking children. Some adults appeared to believe that the spanking was not effective on a spiritual level unless the child cried. If the child would not cry or otherwise express repentance, it was seen as defiance, and the spanking could become too severe. Some spankings went well beyond a few swats, to 10, 15, or even more swats. Some children alleged that they were spanked so often that the skin was chronically irritated. Not all the stories of the frequency of spanking were corroborated, but enough were corroborated to establish an atmosphere of frequent spanking and at times, harsh physical discipline.

At one point, a number of the children remember that one or two of the children wrote a petition regarding the excessive discipline. Besides the children involved in drafting it, some other children remember signing it. It is not clear whether the petition was to ask for a different dorm parent, or related to spanking, nor is it clear exactly what this petition said, because the accounts vary. The child who initiated the petition was considered by staff to be a creative trouble-maker, such that it would not have been taken seriously from that source. The petition was apparently destroyed without being provided to leadership or to parents. It sounded familiar to some of the adults, but no one seemed aware of the contents of the petition. Therefore, while it is regrettable that leadership took no action, IHART was not able to prove now who knew about it, what it actually requested, or the grounds of the action that should have been taken.

Problems with spanking that IHART identified were: (1) some of the children were too young for the degree of the spanking they received; (2) some spankings were much more than two to three swats; (3) some spankings became a battle of wills; and (4) some staff spanked very frequently (daily or even more) rather than occasionally. Also, not only were some children spanked severely when they were too young for such spankings (age 6 or 7), but in some cases children were spanked up into their teens. Credible testimony was given of spankings of both teenage girls and teenage boys, which was considered acceptable at the time.

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In addition to regular spankings that may have been extreme in frequency or severity, certain MKs reported severe beatings that caused bruising or bleeding. The child whose report triggered the investigation was whipped so hard with the fishing pole that the child could not sit down. One person reported a beating where the screaming was stopped by the child's being tied up and gagged. Two boys reported a beating that was extremely severe, with two adults taking turns hitting the children with a 2.5 foot wooden paddle. One of the boys was bruised black and purple, and the bruises lasted a month. The other child's bottom had to be soaked in warm water to get the child's pants unstuck from the skin.

One staff person used the thin end of a fishing pole, without the eyelets, and testimony is that a lead weight was added to the tip to make it swing better. The staff person using it claimed it did not leave marks, and that because it was thin and flexible, it would sting but not bruise. This dorm parent in particular pushed very hard for other adults to use this implement, even giving

“lessons” on spanking. Multiple accounts told that the children spanked with this instrument by this individual were considered to be in the “Tiger Club,” which referenced the stripes left by the instrument. Some report the pole was made of fiber glass, and some of bamboo. It seems likely there were multiple poles.

Extensive testimony from multiple people was that it was untrue that the fishing pole would sting and not bruise. Many MKs testified that a fishing pole left bruises and even cuts. A Pii investigator experimented on himself with a similar instrument, and reported pain, broken skin, bleeding, and bruising. Some spankings with the fishing pole were carried to the point of bruising, bleeding, or highly irritating the skin with welts. But one MK testified that certain people spanked with the pole and did not leave marks beyond minor transient ones, and another dorm parent allowed himself to be spanked with the pole, and it only stung a little. Therefore, it seemed to depend on the person doing the spanking.

There were also MKs who said that, though the atmosphere was strict, it was fair. They denied that spankings were generally harsh. They describe the same dorm parents in very different terms. This second group of MKs state that the retrospective memory of their fellow MKs is unfair, exaggerated, and even inaccurate. For instance, one MK who himself said he was spanked a great deal because he was defiant and destructive, commented on dorm parents who were widely accused, saying that these were fantastic, calm people and the accusations were ridiculous.

The investigative team reached a preponderance of the evidence on the truth of a number of these allegations, finding physical abuse. Although some of the accounts were not substantiated, either in severity or frequency, reports of physical abuse were corroborated for a number of AOs.

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Allegations of Emotional Abuse

So, the kids would write letters to their parents and . . . they would read our mail and I remember one time . . . I really wanted to let Mom and Dad know how much I missed them and . . . that I was just having a hard time. . . . But I knew what I said wouldn't be accepted . . . And so I kept the letter until the last minute and then put it in in the pile . . . she wouldn't let me sent it because it contained stuff that would be hurtful to my parents and make it hard for them to keep doing God's work . . . since I had waited until the last minute and I was trying to be deceitful I couldn't send anything that time. V/S

*And I did not feel like they loved us, which I'm just gonna go on record I hope with big, bold, capital, you know, large font letters as saying that I feel like **the greatest thing that made the difference between great dorm parents and not great dorm parents is the ones who really loved the kids.** V/S*

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There were also allegations of emotional abuse, either in conjunction with other forms of abuse, or separately. Some testified that the constant legalism gave them a feeling of guilt, and that they were inferior and would “never measure up.” An MK commented that it wasn't so much physical abuse as emotional abuse, which might not have been intentional. The damage was in treating every child like a little robot that did everything—or was supposed to do everything— perfectly.

The environment was highly structured, and many MKs could not later handle the transition to the world outside the bubble.

Some MKs commented that the boarding school culture was a toxic one of spiritual shame.

Although hard to pinpoint, the environment of shame created an experience of wounding even in those who were not actually abused.

More than one MK complained about the system of reunion with parents. The staff would meet parents and tell them everything bad the child had done for several months. Then the child was immediately in trouble with his or her parents right at the time of being reunited.

Some dorm parents had unreasonably strict standards for making beds, cleaning rooms, and other performance issues.

Some children were pressured to eat more quickly than they wanted, or to consume more food than they could eat, or to eat food that they disliked. Some children were spanked for not finishing their food. Sometimes children were made to eat when they were sick, or food they could not tolerate, causing them to throw up. Some MKs alleged that on occasion they were forced to eat when they were sick or could not finish that amount of food. At times, this made them throw up. Some children were spanked for not eating enough, or not eating fast enough. Some of the dorm parents had rigid ideas about sexuality and punished small children for normal behavior, believing that they were masturbating or being seductive. Teenage boys were censured for having erections.

One child told the story of an adult killing a bird she had rescued, by smashing it with a rock.

Some MKs testified that dorm parents had distorted views of sexuality. They felt that being female was laden with so many negative images that it was “bad” to be an attractive female.

It is impossible to reach an absolutely accurate evaluation of what happened, and the investigators did not reach a preponderance of evidence finding on all of the above allegations.

Again, MK perceptions of these environments vary greatly. Some MKs did not feel that the dorm life was emotionally abusive.

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It was difficult to pinpoint exactly what problem behaviors happened, as well as the frequency with which they happened. For an example of the elusive truth for emotional abuse, one MK remembered that a fellow MK was forced to eat liver every Sunday, and every Sunday she threw up. The alleged V/S of that incident did not report such an incident at all. The AO stated she did not remember anything of the kind. The mother of the alleged V/S recounted a single incident. What is the most likely truth in this scenario? Is truth discernable? Making a child eat something that she threw up on a one-time basis would not be abusive. Doing it week after week would be abusive. In this scenario, the memories contradict each other, so which MK’s memory is correct? While emotional abuse is difficult to define even today, and standards have changed greatly over the years, and determining exactly what occurred in the distant past is not always possible, what seems clear is that, for many MKs, living in the dorms created painful, or at least unpleasant, memories.

Allegations of Sexual Abuse

The allegations of sexual abuse fell into several categories. In a significant percentage of cases, the allegation was of child-on-child abuse. Much of this alleged abuse did not happen at the school, but in the children's homes in the tribal locations. Some of this alleged abuse was by children close in age, in which case it is considered inappropriate child-on-child behavior or sexual experimentation. Some of the alleged abuse was by much older children. Some children who were alleged perpetrators in one context were also alleged to be V/S in other contexts. Unfortunately, some of these child-on-child allegations could not be corroborated because there was no other evidence, and/or because of the very young age of the V/S at the time. Again, this does not mean that these incidents did or did not occur, only that they could not be corroborated. Allegations of sexual abuse by adults at the school were made but were not numerous. There were a few allegations of inappropriate discussions, such as overly familiar comments to teenage girls, or discussing masturbation with teenage boys. The investigative team found that certain allegations of inappropriate behavior were established by a preponderance of the evidence, such as a dorm father giving girls backrubs that may have been under the shirt on the lower back, or have come too far around the side. Similarly, there were allegations that a dorm father put his hand on a young girl's thigh. While neither memories nor allegations were very clear after so much time, and the definition of boundary violations has changed through the years, certainly dorm parents should have been given more carefully defined boundaries for interaction and physical affection with children.

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Several serious allegations of sexual abuse were made. Pii was not able to corroborate these, despite long and careful investigation. One MK alleged rape by an older Panamanian adult, but the allegation, both then and now, had internal contradictions and could not be corroborated. There was another account of an affair with a Panamanian adult, but since it was an older adolescent MK involved with a young adult Panamanian (5 year age spread), it would have been considered consensual at that period of time. There were recovered memories of severe sexual abuse of small children through what amounted to a sodomy prostitution ring. Pii extensively interviewed many MKs and others who would have been expected to have knowledge of this, but the allegations were not supported, and seemed inconsistent with other evidence, so Pii was unable to reach the preponderance of the evidence.⁶

Summary of Allegations Made and Findings Related to Leadership

The leadership investigation focused on whether leaders knew or should have known of abuse, and whether leaders took action or ignored allegations. Some allegations of child abuse were reported to leadership or staff, and were dealt with at the time of the alleged event. Many other allegations were never reported, primarily those of physical abuse. While the NTM culture may have made reporting less likely, it was determined that individual leaders could only be held responsible for events of which they had knowledge or had been made aware.

The IHART leadership investigation interviewed or attempted to interview former NTM leaders. The majority of the interviews focused on potential leadership culpability of the former EHM School Committee, the Panama Field Committee, and the Executive Committee. The team also interviewed NTM administrative staff to gather background information. The team

⁶ Experts suggest that current best practices are that findings on recovered memories be supported by independent corroborating evidence.

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attempted to interview former NTM missionaries/parents of children in the school, to determine if they had reported concerns. Only one parent of MKs agreed to be interviewed for this portion of the investigation; the others did not respond.

In the end, varying degrees of culpability were found for several leaders, including three former Field Committee leaders under whom much of the worst alleged abuse occurred. For these leaders, IHART was able to establish either actual knowledge, or that they were aware of enough that they should have known to investigate abuse. It seemed clear that one particular Field Committee, which was in place a long time, had culpability. One former leader commented that this Committee chose to put a man in place of looking after children at the missionary school “knowing how brutal he was.” The leadership investigative team and Pii were able to find specific and substantiated facts that these leaders knew about this individual and others. For some other leaders, MKs stated that they were sure the leaders knew. This could not be substantiated, and in fact the culture of the mission seemed to mitigate against that. In other cases, MKs stated that they or their parents had told leaders of allegations. However, the investigative team was not able to track down what was specifically said, and in some cases, there were direct contradictions in the stories, or it seemed that what had been said might have been very general.

Also, though some leaders may well have known more than IHART could discover, it was almost impossible, 20 to 30 years later, to determine whether leaders had culpable knowledge and what they were told. Field Committee communications with the Executive Committee were often vague. In addition, due to record keeping practices of the day, it was rarely clear who on the Field Committee or the Executive Committee was privy to knowledge or decision-making in any given situation.

While many MKs were convinced and testified that there was broad awareness by leadership of the abuse that was happening, very little solid evidence of this awareness existed. It does not speak highly of leadership that leaders did not know, but it seems that for the most part, the code of silence kept abuse from being revealed to leaders. And since most adults of the day had little understanding of abuse, leaders did not know what to ask.

There was some testimony that leadership endorsed the practice of shunning—having people ignore or avoid talking to missionaries who were involved in some kind of misconduct, often while they were waiting to be sent home. While this seems to have happened on a practical level, it does not seem to have been a specific policy or practice either for the Panama field or the mission. Also, though unpleasant and painful for the person being shunned, this practice cannot be called abuse.

IHART regrets that it was not possible to establish individual leadership culpability more firmly. It certainly remains possible that additional leaders had specific knowledge of abuse. However, IHART believes that general leadership failures are shown by the discussion of the cultural problems that NTM had at that time. IHART deplores the failure of leaders at that time to press

for more information when there was obviously some kind of problem. Thankfully, the approach today is much more energetic and proactive.

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CURRENT POLICIES AND MOVING FORWARD

Current Child Protection Policies

As NTM entered into the 2000s, it realized that more needed to be done. NTM was one of the founding organizations in the Child Safety and Protection Network, believing that working together with other organizations would allow the standards to be raised for all. While NTM has received more media attention than most missions about its child safety problems, this is partly because the NTM MKs have been very proactive in advocating for change, and partly because of NTM's ongoing commitment to investigating and addressing past wrongs.

Whatever the causes, NTM is currently one of the leading mission organizations in regard to proactive steps for child safety. All NTM USA personnel receive child protection training in numerous steps. While in training, all candidates for membership participate in a live training course. Following training, all newly accepted members must successfully complete an additional online child safety training course and all current members are required to successfully complete the current online NTM training course biennially. Additionally, there is age-appropriate training available for all school age children. This training is aimed at giving children the tools to recognize inappropriate behavior, whether from an adult or peer, and to have an understanding of how to speak up against such actions.

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NTM has designated child safety staff at each USA location. These are intended to be caring individuals who would be approachable by a child in any distress. Their names and roles are made known. Each NTM overseas school also has staff members in a similar role. These individuals are aware of reporting procedures and contact information should any situation arise. Besides members, all interns and volunteers who work with children also receive appropriate screening and training. NTM USA child care facilities follow NTM USA Policy as well as have location specific procedures and requirements for their workers.

Current Educational Policies and Statistics for NTM USA

Currently, educators and other support staff for schools and other ministries with children are chosen by their gifting and training, specifically for those roles.

NTM USA now leaves the type of schooling used for children up to the family. Each family is encouraged to research their options independently and also to use the NTM Educational Resource Committee. Families are also encouraged to dialogue about their choices with churches associated with each family. Options available to families today typically include homeschool, local (traditional) day schools, distance education, host country schools and boarding schools. It is currently never recommended that a student younger than grade seven be enrolled in a boarding school. The statistics below show the huge shift that has come about regarding schooling choices.

Families are also encouraged to have an annual assessment of the educational progress and needs of their children. This can be accomplished with national standards tests or with consultation of educational staff.

Here are statistics for the 2015-2016 school year for children whose parents are with NTM USA and who are living overseas:

427 children

o 282 children homeschooling (66% of total)

o 145 children attending traditional schools (34% of total)

o 15 of the 145 are NTM USA children in NTM boarding schools (3.5% of total)

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Recommendations from the Investigation

IHART solicited recommendations for change. Some of these recommendations came directly from MKs, and some were observations from IHART investigators.

- NTM USA personnel, volunteers, and associates should receive an adequate pre-field screening that includes a background check and in-depth check of references.
- Staff working with children should be adequately trained for the tasks assigned. Teachers should be trained and certified, and should also be able to recognize and address learning disabilities.
- Alternative methods of schooling should be permitted, such as home school, with boarding school only for older students.
- Corporal punishment at schools should be eliminated.
- Each field should have adequate child protection policies in place.
- NTM USA should provide comprehensive and continuing training of all members and staff in child protection issues, with regular refresher classes.
- Children should also be trained in child protection safeguards, as well as sex education.

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- Children should be trained in relationships between boys and girls in a way that would lay a foundation for healthy marriages.
- Mission leaders should receive leadership training and an orientation to the expectations for leaders.
- The number of persons who report directly to an individual leader should not be more than an individual leader can handle.
- When there has been an allegation of child abuse, a child safety assessment should be performed, both for the alleged victim and to identify other vulnerable children.
- An adequate number of people on each field should be trained in how to respond to allegations and further internal investigations.
- Administrative leave and conflict-of-interest policies should be in place for response to allegations.
- For child abuse or other criminal activity that takes place overseas, reports to local authorities should be made in compliance with legal standards, and when it is in the best interests of the alleged victim.

- For child abuse or other criminal activity that takes place overseas, reports should be made to U.S. authorities or to other authorities in host countries to see if they will take jurisdiction.⁷
- Sending churches should be notified of the reasons for dismissal, of services that the returning missionary V/S or AO family may need, and of potential liability issues or the need for a safety plan. The notifications should be memorialized in the NTM files.
- Missionaries who are dismissed should have no continuing access to mission locations, NTM ministries, or other areas where children may be at risk.
- In the historical Panama Field, written correspondence was irregular and vague. Minutes of Field Committee meetings were often not detailed. Field leaders should submit monthly status reports to NTM USA, and should maintain minutes of field meetings that clearly explain the issues discussed.
- For missionary families returning home, there should be some kind of debriefing provided.
- Counseling should be offered for MKs dealing with emotional issues from alleged or perceived child abuse issues.

⁷ While historically, this was not the standard of care, and authorities would not have taken jurisdiction over international allegations, this standard of care has changed considerably in recent years.

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RESPONSE FROM NTM LEADERSHIP

Letter of Apology from NTM USA Executive Board

The following is a public letter of apology to the Panama MKs and their parents from the NTM USA Executive Board. MKs who were found to be victims will also be receiving a more personal letter of apology from NTM.

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NTM Response to Recommendations

NTM USA received the listing of recommendations included in this report which were made by MKs and the investigators. These recommendations were directed toward many of our procedures and came to us through the IHART Coordinator.

The list of recommendations reminds us where we have come from, and where we hope to go. Thankfully some of the items listed have already been addressed, and we will mention those below. We continue to evaluate and search for ways in which we can improve as an organization, and the listing of recommendations highlights some areas for us to consider and address. We hope that the information below will be an encouragement to those who have spoken up to effect change.

A number of the recommendations dealt with policy shortcomings. It is true that during the timeframe prior to the mid-1990s there were few, if any, adequate guidelines for child safety issues in dorms, schools or for mission-wide concerns. We functioned under the belief that members would act in consistent, godly ways toward children and each other. Unfortunately, this was not always the case. Historically, we functioned under the assumption that leaders would consistently apply godly principles to circumstances that arose. It is equally disappointing that this was not always the case either.

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As child abuse and areas of mistreatment began to be recognized both in the general culture and at NTM, we implemented training on child safety and formed policy to protect children. As understanding and knowledge increased, so have our training and policies. Though many changes have been made over the years to our training and policies, we continue to conduct research and receive education to improve in these areas.

All of our members (career and associate) receive child safety training. Initial training takes place in a face-to-face program. Additionally, all members must successfully complete an online refresher training and exam every other year. Any volunteer working for more than 13 days OR who is directly working with children also takes the online training course. Anyone working in a child care setting receives additional training with details specific to that location.

During their training in the USA, families are given at least one opportunity, and often multiple opportunities, to have their children participate in an age-appropriate training on child safety. For this, we currently use curriculum provided by Praesidium to equip children with tools to empower them to say “no” and to speak up about situations where they feel uncomfortable. One area consistently reported in this investigation was inappropriate and excessive corporal punishment and as result, many of the recommendations centered on discipline. Today, our policies state that there is to be no corporal punishment by anyone other than a parent in any of our schools or child care settings.

Historically, parents had little choice if any on schooling for their children. Today, parents make the determination as to the best type of schooling situation for their families. We have an Education Resource Center (ERC) that has been established to aid parents in the schooling of their children. The team at this Center is qualified to help with things such as learning styles, learning disabilities, curriculum choices, and standardized testing, to ensure that children are on par with their peers, regardless of the type of education chosen by the parents. Besides the ERC, each of our three remaining NTM schools also has various options for screening and assisting students with various learning disabilities, as do most of the international schools NTM children attend. If a student is discovered to have learning needs outside of the areas where we can provide assistance, the family may be advised to return to their home country to get the help necessary for their child.

The change that has taken place in schooling methods is significant and can best be shown by the current (2015-2016) statistics revealing that only 15 children of our USA members overseas are now in dormitory situations in NTM schools. In addition, we recommend that children be in 7th grade or higher to be in a dormitory in one of these schools. Homeschooling has become the norm for most families.

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Another change that has taken place is that requirements for serving in a school setting have been established and/or increased. We recruit and accept personnel for specific needs identified by the individual schools. After a screening process that involves multiple references, and also a thorough background check, individuals are accepted based on their qualifications to fill specific needs.

In 2007, NTM internationalized, and is no longer governed by a central leadership team. When this took place, the NTM Executive Committee disbanded and each individual field became autonomous. NTM USA was formed at this time and is now governed by an Executive Board which oversees NTM USA operations only. The Global Ministry Agreement that serves as the structural backbone of the world-wide organization of NTM provides policy requirements and specifically states that each country where we work must have a child safety policies. NTM USA further requires that there be a designated “safe person” for each ministry location. This “safe person” must be someone who is equipped to receive an allegation of abuse and must also be someone who would be perceived as approachable. Although we have no NTM primary or secondary schools located in the USA, there is at least one “safe person” identified for each of our USA-based centers also.

In our Child Safety Manual, procedures are in place requiring an assessment of allegations received and requirements for the make-up of team members for any investigation. Should the local authorities investigate an allegation, our NTM procedures are put on hold until any civil or criminal proceedings are completed. NTM USA reports allegations of abuse to the appropriate authorities, in line with appropriate legal standards and current best practices.

The recommendations we received mentioned handling of dismissals and follow up services offered to those involved in an allegation of abuse. If a current member of NTM USA has an allegation against them, the person is put on administrative leave until the situation is resolved. All actions and outcomes are noted in the permanent record of a member who has violated any part of our child safety policies. If a member is found to have committed sexual abuse through the criminal justice system, or to have violated NTM policy regarding sexual abuse of a child, our policy states that the member will be dismissed, their Sending Church and all donors will receive appropriate notification, and the individual will never be eligible to again become a member of NTM. NTM USA will not accept anyone for membership who has been confirmed to have committed sexual abuse of a child, either through legal action or an internal inquiry. NTM policy states that immediately following receipt of an allegation, a safety plan for the child is put in place. Support is provided for the child and family throughout the investigative process as appropriate and NTM makes funds for counseling available.

It was recommended that debriefing be made available to all members. This is an area NTM USA has been evaluating and working at implementing for some time. We have a Regional Member

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Care Team in place, with individuals who have been trained in the area of debriefing readily available. We are continuously looking into ways in which we can be more effective in this, and appreciate the reminder. While we do currently provide opportunities for all members to participate in a debriefing, it is not required at this point.

It was also recommended that NTM have “conflict of interest” policies in place. It is true that historically these were lacking; however today NTM has “conflict of interest” policies in place for varying situations, abuse issues being one of them.

In reviewing the recommendations, there are a few that might create specific complications. It was recommended that we teach sex education and train in relationships between boys and girls to lay a foundation for healthy marriages. As a mission organization, we seek to maintain healthy boundaries for our involvement in the lives of our members and their children. While we are definitely concerned with the well-being of the children of our members, we feel that to require either of these recommendations would stretch that boundary. We do not believe that it is out of bounds for a school, knowing the missionaries it serves, to teach sex education or relationship classes, but for us to require or set guidelines for those subjects is beyond the scope of what we see as appropriate involvement. We believe that permission to teach these subjects should come from the parents.

It was also mentioned that NTM USA should require that field leaders submit monthly status reports and keep record of field meetings that would clearly explain the issues discussed. Much has changed in the structure of NTM since the days considered in these investigations. In this day of globalization and the international Church, each field is autonomous. However, in the area of child safety, there are safeguards in place. Our USA protocol, which is required of all USA members and which is agreed upon by overseas leadership teams, requires that any child safety issue or allegation that surfaces regarding a member of NTM USA or a child of a USA member must be reported to our USA Child Protection team.

The recommendation was made that a report of an allegation overseas should be made to the local authorities. We appreciate the further mention in the recommendation that these reports should be made when it is in the best interest of the child. NTM's default position is that these reports will be made, except in circumstances where it is not in the best interests of the child. Unfortunately, reporting standards and procedures of some of the countries we work in are not on a comparable level to the current practices of the USA. Reports may not be mandatory, and local authorities may not be equipped to handle them. In some countries, current standard practice is that only the child (not a parent or another adult) can make the report, and the child would then be subject to interrogation by the local authorities. These and other situations could be very traumatic to a young child. In addition, we always report to U.S. authorities when U.S. citizens are involved. We also believe that the parents (assuming that a parent is not the alleged

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offender) should have a voice in the reporting process overseas if it differs significantly from the U.S., so that the situation is handled in the best interest of the child. In addition to this reporting protocol, the NTM child safety procedures will be followed.

In closing, we are humbled and grateful for the teams and individuals who made this report possible. Thank you to each person for your honesty in speaking into a difficult situation.

Commitment to the Future

The Executive Board of NTM USA would like to publicly reaffirm their commitment to the IHART process. We believe the thorough investigation of historical abuse allegations is the right thing to do.

Our original goals for this process have not changed. These are: to be certain that there is no current member of New Tribes Mission USA who has abused children; to give victims an avenue

to tell their story; to offer a means for counseling for any victims who desire that; and to learn from the past to make our organization as safe as possible for all children.

Investigative Information

For general information about IHART or information about specific investigations, go to ihart.care. For those involved in specific investigations, a log-in to a password-protected page will be provided upon request.

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Contact for Reports or Information

If you have a story or information that you believe would be helpful to the IHART process, you are encouraged to contact IHART directly at:

Phone: 1-407-304-8476

Email: contact@ihart.care

You may also contact New Tribes Mission USA directly at:

Phone: 1-407-547-2315

Email: dcp@ntm.org

If you are an NTM MK who would like information on help that is available to you, please use any of the contact listings above.

If you are someone or know of someone within NTM USA who may be experiencing abuse, please contact the authorities immediately and then the NTM USA Department of Child Protection at the contact listings above.

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