



Statement about the Shincheonji Cult

Sept 25th 2019

In recent weeks we have become aware of the Shincheonji (SCJ) cult operating within several Wellington churches including our own. You may have seen this recent media story featuring Nick Field from The Street Church:

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/115367268/pastor-issues-warning-over-religious-cult-shincheonji-operating-in-wellington>

We have reason to believe that SCJ recruiters have visited OCC on at least one occasion in the past couple of months and have attempted to engage with a small number of people here. Thankfully these individuals declined any further involvement with those visitors.

One of our real strengths at OCC is the way we welcome and embrace new people. We don't want that to change but we also need to be vigilant. SCJ members look like normal Kiwis of all ethnicities. They dress normally, claim to have regular jobs, are intelligent, well spoken, warm, kind and appear to be genuinely nice people. They are also taught that it is okay to lie and deceive for the purpose of recruiting members, which unfortunately they do. Those we have encountered were single people between the ages of 18 and 35 years old (but this may not always be the case). Don't expect that you will be able to spot them if they walked into church.

Further helpful information about the cult, how they operate, and what you should do is set out on the following pages. Please do read this.

As noted in the information that follows, if you are invited by anyone to be mentored or join a Bible Study group, make sure that you do your due diligence and check they are affiliated with a known and reputable church. Do not just take their word for it but follow it up and check with the church they claim to be from. Also, ask to see the statement of faith and the qualifications of the mentor/leader.

If you have any further concerns or questions, please chat to one of us or to Pete RR. We'd also like to hear from you if you think you or someone you know may have been approached and/or are currently in contact with people from SCJ. We are here to help.

Please be praying for our church and for other churches in our city who have been hit hard by this. Pray also for those lost in this cult and those negatively impacted by it.

From the OCC Elders
Jim, Stu, Hunter



The following information has been adapted and used with permission from the author - Andrew Southerton from City On A Hill Church (Wellington)

The Cult – Shincheonji

Shincheonji (also known as SCJ, the “New Heaven and New Earth” church or Shincheonji Church of Jesus the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony) is a dangerous and deceptive cult that originated in South Korea in 1984. In short, they believe that the founder, Lee Man-hee is the second coming of Jesus and that only he can interpret the true meaning of the Bible.

A simple Google search of this group will reveal that they have all the hallmarks of a cult. Features such as:

- Only they have the secret knowledge and way to salvation
- The 144,000 in the Book of Revelation refers specifically and exclusively to them
- Salvation by works – specifically recruiting/harvesting new members for the cult
- Special revelation outside and contradictory to the Bible
- The founder is believed to have divine qualities – more than human
- Only the leader can correctly interpret scripture

Generally, SCJ doesn't 'evangelise' people in the traditional sense – trying to share with un-churched people the good news of Jesus. The way they operate is to send recruiters into existing churches to form relationships with people attending the church in order to remove them, establish them in the cult and then use them to recruit more people from the church/group

The cult has been active in recruiting people from churches in Auckland in the last few years and has done significant damage to several churches. One church lost a number of families including worship leaders, kids and youth leaders, community group leaders and even an elder of the church. It has damaged churches and destroyed families

How they operate

Even though the cult originates from South Korea, their members in Wellington reflect every ethnicity of our NZ community and the majority we have identified would be NZ European. They have come across as warm and friendly, arriving at church early, sticking around for a good amount after the service and being very chatting with people. Generally, they have all been single people in their 20s who are university educated or hold down respectable jobs. Most have said that they have moved down from Auckland this year for work or study. They seem to be mostly targeting people in their 20s and 30s with an emphasis on those who are single

A common approach they have adopted is to arrive in a pair with one of them claiming they attend another well-known church in town and that they have brought along their friend who has just moved to Wellington and is looking for a church family/is keen to make some Christian friends. This has meant that as we extend hospitality to them (a coffee, a walk, a catch-up during the week, etc.) we have been thinking that we are welcoming a new person to church, but they are using the interaction to initiate a relationship, build connections in order to begin the process of introducing people to SCJ



They have also initiated contact with other people they have met at church either before the service or at morning tea

Usually from the first contact leads to a coffee and they will be very friendly and seem like a great person. As the interaction continues, they will be introducing you to a 'friends' of theirs. This is sometimes arranged to seem like a happy co-incidence. 'I bumped into a friend on the way, do you mind if they join us?' but in reality, it is all planned out

Often there is an invitation to either meet with a mentor that 'they have found really helpful' or to go to a Bible Study/Theology Workshop. At the groups the first week they do a presentation on 'What is theology' and 'How to read the Bible'. They get phone numbers, email addresses, ask you to join WhatsApp (so messages are encrypted and can be deleted in the future) and try to begin meeting up individually with a mentor or missionary. They often falsely claim that the mentor/missionary has trained at Laidlaw Bible College or works with YWAM to add credibility to the person

The Bible Studies/Theology Workshops are an exercise in social engineering with the majority of attendees being members of the cult pretending to be other 'new people' keen to learn from the Bible. They give the group a really positive vibe, make it seem like the leaders really know what they are talking about and make it difficult to ask challenging questions. They use phrases like "Food at the proper time" to deflect questions that might arise suspicion early in the process

The studies begin pretty normally but over time they become more unorthodox. They focus on making sure we don't miss the Messiah and subtly begin the process of thought control and indoctrination. They are taught by the group to not trust their old church and pastors. The name of the cult is withheld until they are well and truly involved and they are discouraged to read online criticisms about the cult

They are also taught, using the stories for Abraham & Isaac, Jacob & Esau and Rahab and the Spies, that it is ok to lie and deceive if you are doing God's will. They call it 'being wise' and instruct the recruits to 'be wise' (i.e. lie) about who they are meeting and what they are doing. They're not to share what they're learning with outsiders until 'their cup is full', if they share then they will be pouring out their knowledge and it will take more time to 'fill'

Over a period of time they begin attending 'Bible Study' three times a week with SCJ and begin to pressure recruits to prioritise it over their previous church commitments and relationships. Many recruits end up pulling out of most of their other social groups and hobbies/interests and give vague answers when asked where they are or what they've been doing. They withdraw from family and friends and devote all their time and money to the cult and may be sent out by the leadership to harvest more members

What you should do

If you have any contact with SCJ we recommend ending all contact immediately. Do not meet with them, their mentors, their missionaries or attend their groups. Ignore their messages do not respond. They are a dangerous and deceptive cult and you do not need to give them any warning or explanation



Experience with the group has shown that they will try hard to make contact with you and for you to meet with a leader within the group who will be able to sort out your 'confusion' or that it must be some sort of mistake/misunderstanding that can be explained

If you are invited anyone to be mentored or join a Bible Study group, make sure do you due diligence and check they are affiliate with a known and reputable church. Do not just take their word for it but follow it up and check with the church they claim to be from. Also, ask to see the statement of faith and the qualifications of the mentor/leader

Further Resources

Advice for churches in dealing with SCJ

<http://cityonahill.co.nz/scjforchurches/>

A pamphlet put together by a former SCJ Member

<http://cityonahill.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/SCJ-Pamphlet.docx>

A Facebook Page about SCJ in Wellington

<https://www.facebook.com/SCJWellington>

DoubleThink – a South African website by former SCJ Members

<http://doublethink.co.za/>