

What is INFORM?

INFORM is a **non-sectarian charity** (Reg. 801729), which was founded in 1988 to help enquirers by providing **information** about **new religious movements*** that is as accurate, balanced, and up-to-date as possible.

The Need

Anxious relatives and friends have had difficulty obtaining reliable information about the beliefs and practices of an unfamiliar religious or spiritual group that someone close to them has joined.

Politicians and clergy have been besieged with requests to “do something” about unfamiliar groups with unusual beliefs and practices that would appear to give cause for concern, but they have often found difficulty in knowing how to get objective information about the groups that they were being asked to do something about.

As a consequence of both **lack of information** and **misinformation, inappropriate actions** have been taken, leading, in some cases, to tragic results.

What does INFORM do?

INFORM **helps enquirers** either by **giving** them **information** directly or by putting them in touch with its extensive international network of experts.

INFORM's **research** involves the collection, analysis and dissemination of information about the diverse beliefs, practices, membership, organisation, and whereabouts of new religions, as well as issues related to the movements.

INFORM's **network** includes scholars and organisations engaged in research; experts with specialist knowledge (such as lawyers, medical practitioners, clergy); those with personal experience (such as relatives and former members of the movements); and members of the movements themselves.

Although INFORM does not itself offer a **counselling** service, it can put enquirers in touch with somebody on its network who can offer help: this could be assistance from a professional counsellor; pastoral care from a member of a

mainstream religion; or sympathetic support from someone with an understanding of the situation.

INFORM sometimes **mediates** between relatives of a member of a movement and the member and/or the movement itself. However, no one is ever contacted unless the enquirer explicitly requests INFORM to do so.

INFORM organises two day-long **seminars** each year on a variety of issues concerning new religions. It has also organised large **international conferences** that have attracted scholars from all over the world. Both these forums provide an opportunity for participants to gain and exchange information of both practical and theoretical use.

INFORM can provide **speakers** for schools, universities, religious and other institutions.

INFORM welcomes **visitors** to its central London office (by appointment). Here they can talk to staff and conduct their own research, consulting a wide range of books, cassettes, videos, and files on over 3000 different groups.

INFORM provides **literature**, such as leaflets about particular movements, and articles written by scholars.

New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction (London: HMSO 1989, 1995. ISBN: 0-11-340927-3) by Professor Eileen Barker provides background information on the beliefs, practices, attractions and potential dangers of the movements. It also contains details of thirty of the better-known groups as well as practical suggestions for parents, clergy, teachers, students and the general reader.

Who uses INFORM?

Anyone who has either a query or information about new religious groups is invited to get in touch with INFORM. Contacts from all over the world include the friends and relatives of people who have joined one of the new religious movements, former members, leaders of the established religions and affiliated bodies, secular agencies, schools, colleges, academics, research students, government departments, law enforcement agencies, the media, and members of the general public.

INFORM Policy

INFORM's Board of **Governors** is responsible for formulating its policy. A Management Committee, consisting of three members of the Board, is responsible for practical decisions and supervising the work of the office staff.

Confidentiality is strictly respected where individual cases are concerned. Messages may be recorded or monitored for training purposes.

INFORM's policy of maintaining direct contact, wherever possible, with new religions does not imply that it agrees with or approves of these movements.

Funding

INFORM receives funding from the Home Office and the mainstream Churches, and it has had generous contributions from foundations including Smith's; J.P.Getty; Nuffield; Wates; and the Jerusalem Trust.

Other organisations have given assistance either with grants or in kind. In addition, INFORM receives some donations from enquirers and makes small profits from its seminars and the sale of literature.

INFORM has a policy of not accepting money from any of the new religious movements or any other organisation that might wish to prejudice the outcome of its research.

**No attempt is made here to define too precisely the term 'new religious movement'. It is used merely to provide a common-sense starting point to cover what others have called cults, sects, non-conventional religions, alternative religions or self religions, as well as new movements in established religions.*

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Enquirers can write, telephone, or make an appointment to visit INFORM's office.

Outside office hours (10 am - 4.30 pm, Monday - Friday), messages may be left on the voice mail, which is checked at regular intervals.

