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Hope For Gloriavale?

The Gloriavale Christian Community says that they "seek to live a practical Christian life that mirrors life in heaven".[1] Yet a recent news headline announces that a "Major Gloriavale investigation finds 138 potential abuse victims, dozens of suspected offenders".[2] It is the jarring collision of heavenly vision against sordid earthly reality.

Sadly, this is just the latest addition to a long series of personal stories and public court cases that describe Gloriavale as dysfunctional, producing a stream of hurt and abused people. If Gloriavale has a future, what might that future look like?

Many leavers have contributed to the creation of this document, and have tried to cast a vision of a better future. They have looked at two options. 1) What would a healthy Gloriavale look like? 2) What if Gloriavale were ended. In answering these questions, groups and agencies will see that leavers still care about their families inside, and that they want what's best for them.

1. It is written for the benefit of both those who have left Gloriavale already and those who are still resident there. It tries to consider what might be in the best interests of both groups of people.

2. It is written from a Christian world view. Gloriavale whatever its failings is a Christian religious community and we have framed the issues with that in mind.

3. It is also written for a general audience rather than just a specifically Christian or religious audience which means the language doesn't use spiritual jargon and overt Biblical references for ease of understanding.

This document does not seek to establish whether reform or closure is a preferred path, but rather what leavers would like to see if either of those options play out.

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[1] - Gloriavale Christian Community website – Hello and Welcome Section 9 January 2024

[2] - Major Gloriavale investigation finds 138 potential abuse victims, dozens of suspected offenders – Blair Ensor, Stuff 2 December 2023.

A. What Would A Healthy Gloriavale Look Like?

A healthy Gloriavale requires basic freedoms for its residents, suitable leadership for its activities and repentance for past wrongdoing.

Basic Freedom For Every Resident

The fact these freedoms need to be listed and described indicates that they not presently part of what it means to live Gloriavale.

1. **Religious Freedom**
    a. The freedom of people to read the Bible for themselves and hold beliefs based upon their own understanding and conscience. The freedom to access and keep books and other materials for themselves based upon their interests and preference.
    b. The freedom to choose to be part of the church at Gloriavale or another Christian church or no church at all while still living at Gloriavale.

2. **Financial Freedom**
    a. The freedom of people to earn and keep their own money, to buy and keep their own possessions and assets and keep these for their own use.
    b. The freedom of people to seek the job of their choice or to start their own business whether at Gloriavale or elsewhere and to take vacations according to their earned entitlements.
    c. The freedom of people to choose what they will give to support the church at Gloriavale or other causes or individuals according to their own conscience and capacity.
    d. The freedom of and access to financial training and education that enables them to understand money and how to use it well.

3. **Family Freedom**
    a. The freedom of adults to marry the person of their choice whether that person is within Gloriavale or without.
    b. Freedom of married couples to decide how many children they want to have and when they want to have them according to what their conscience and health allows.
    c. Freedom to ensure personal and family safety and protections even if it requires separation or divorce
    d. The freedom of families to be distinct families and of parents to be parents.
    e. The freedom of families to live in independent rather than communal housing and to their own privacy and security whether at Gloriavale or elsewhere.
    f. The freedom of families within communal housing to have their own space, privacy, and security.
    g. The freedom of parents to determine what education their children need and what chores or work they might do.
    h. The freedom of families to maintain close ties with family and friends outside of Gloriavale and have them visit as needed and desired.

4. **Health Freedom**
    a. The freedom of individual adults to make their own decisions about their health care.
    b. The freedom of families to make their own decisions about the health care of their own family.
    c. The freedom of people to access quality healthcare for their physical, dental, and mental needs when they need it.
    d. The freedom of individuals and families to ensure personal sports and recreation when they need it.
    e. The freedom of individuals from sexual, physical, emotional, mental/psychological and spiritual abuse.

5. **Mobility Freedom**
    a. The freedom of people to learn to drive as they need and want to.
    b. The freedom of people to own their own vehicles and transport or to have access to transport when they need and want it.

c. The freedom of people to travel where and when they need or want to.

6. **Education Freedom**
    a. The freedom of people to access quality education that meets national standards and gives opportunity for later trade or tertiary education.
    b. The freedom of people to choose tertiary training and education according to their interest and ability.

7. **Information Freedom**
    a. The freedom of people to access information about the outside world or areas of knowledge and interest according to their choice.
    b. The freedom of people to own and use their own phones, computers and internet capable devices within their own choices, privacy, and security.

Suitable Leadership That Serves The Interests of Residents

Leadership at Gloriavale should be reorganised into three separate groups to provide clarity of focus and a separation of powers to help ensure leadership consistently acts in the best interests of people.

1. **Church Leadership**
   These should be servant hearted leaders who provide spiritual direction of the church at Gloriavale. They should provide oversight of the teaching, worship, fellowship, and outreach of the church.
2. **Civil Leadership**
   Gloriavale is really a village or a small town so it should have a separate 'civil administration' which attends to the needs of the 'town'. This group would be responsible for ensuring that the facilities and environment are well run and looked after. They would ensure that residents have suitable housing, medical, dental and mental health services, a local store, cell phone tower and a police presence.
3. **Business Leadership**
   The business activities of Gloriavale are vital to providing employment and the resources necessary to sustain the church and the town of Gloriavale. As such business units should be part of a cooperative in which residents hold shares.
4. **In all cases leadership needs to be accountable**
    a. Leadership needs to be elected by those they lead whether by church members voting for Shepherds, residents voting for civil administration or shareholders voting for Directors. Leaders should be appointed for specified terms after which they would stand down or run again for election.
    b. Leadership groups for the church, the town and the business to need be transparent in their operations reporting upon their activities and decisions in comprehensive, timely and easy to understand ways so that church members, residents and shareholders are properly informed.
5. **A person should only be able to serve on one leadership group at any time** to help prevent any one person getting too powerful.
6. **There should also be the option to appoint external people** with needed expertise to the civil and business leadership groups.

Necessary Repentance For Past Wrongs

Gloriavale has a long history of sad and bad outcomes for many people. This leaves a legacy that needs to be atoned for. Repentance will mean more than an apology it requires specific actions like the ones mentioned below.

1. The removal of existing Gloriavale leadership as a group tainted by negligence, misconduct, and bad judgement.
2. A reckoning for Gloriavale members guilty of criminal behaviour so that justice is done and seen to be done.
3. Appropriate recompense for past mistreatment.

B. What If Gloriavale Was Ended?

If Gloriavale were to end, through whatever means, a suitable ending for Gloriavale should give its residents maximum help and preparation for a new life and recompense those who have already left for past wrongs. The ending process should also work toward preventing a reoccurrence of Gloriavale and its many problems on the existing site or elsewhere.

1. **A Gradual But Total Ending**
    a. The ending of Gloriavale should be an orderly, phased, and gradual process that enables residents to prepare for a new life in the outside world and maximises the sale value of community assets. It will need to be a multi-year transition.
    b. The ending should also be a total end with assets sold, legal structures dissolved, and no rump or remnant group of people allowed to remain on the site.

2. **Accountability And Justice**
    Gloriavale has a long history of sad and bad outcomes for many people. This leaves a legacy that needs addressing as the community comes to an end.
    a. Gloriavale leadership is tainted by past negligence, misconduct, and bad judgement so they cannot be relied upon to properly oversee the ending of the community. An external or statutory group should be the overseer of this process with input from both residents and leavers of Gloriavale.
    b. A reckoning for Gloriavale members guilty of criminal behaviour so that justice is done and seen to be done.
    c. Appropriate recompense for past mistreatment.

3. **Spiritual Preparation For Resettlement**
    Gloriavale whatever its failings is a faith community. The spiritual needs of its residents must be recognised and addressed in any resettlement process.
    a. External church connection to Westland churches and churches with a history of and/or potential for integrating leavers should be encouraged and resourced. Some 80% of Gloriavale leavers join a church. This connection has been a vital part in their resettlement.
    b. During the ending process Gloriavale residents must be free to:
        i. Read the Bible for themselves and hold beliefs based upon their own understanding and conscience.
        ii. To access and keep books and other materials for themselves based upon their interests and preference.
        iii. Choose to be part of the church at Gloriavale or another Christian church or no church at all while still living at Gloriavale.
    c. The cemetery at Gloriavale should however be preserved and protected out of respect for those who have passed and for the sake of their family and friends. Right of access to the cemetery should also be guaranteed.

4. **Educational Preparation For Resettlement**
    Gloriavale residents of all ages will need educational support for the transition to a life in the outside world.
        a. The school will need to refocus on preparing students for life in the outside world rather than just a life within Gloriavale.
            i. Teaching staff from outside Gloriavale will likely be needed to provide the necessary expertise.
            ii. An external group like the New Zealand Association of Christian Schools (NZACS) should oversee school operations during the transition. Christian schools have been a preferred option for leaver families and NZACS has a national network that can support widespread resettlement.
        b. All adults and older young people should receive financial literacy training covering the basics of budgeting, banking, taxation, and debt prior to exiting Gloriavale.

c. Career planning advice should also be provided people aged 16 or over to help establish future education and employments options.
d. Training and mentoring should be provided for those who wish to start their own business.

5. Medical Preparation for Resettlement

a. All residents should have physical, dental and mental health checks during the transition and any untreated conditions should be properly addressed prior to exit from the community.

6. Support During Resettlement

a. Prior to exiting the community, a resettlement plan should be established for each family or individual leaving.
b. The plan should address housing, employment, education, spiritual and counselling needs for each family and individual.
c. The plan should also be supported by and integrated with agencies, groups, and churches in the destination the resident will be moving to.

7. A Financial Ending And Distribution

a. All assets are sold and put into a resettlement fund for distribution to residents and leavers.
b. All residents and leavers should have an entitlement to a share of the resettlement fund based upon the following factors:
    i. The time spent living at Gloriavale.
    ii. The number of dependent children in resident families at the ending of Gloriavale.
    iii. The number of dependent children that were in leaver families at the time they left Gloriavale.
    iv. Financial contribution to the original founding of the community.
c. Once entitlements have been finalised then all the resettlement funds should be paid out to residents and leavers in a lump sum or instalments as practicable.

"He has told you, O man, what is good;

and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness,

and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8 (ESV)