



**THINKING
OF LEAVING?**

HI THERE!

Are you thinking of leaving a high-demand religious group? You might find the following booklet helpful to read over before you do!

There is no one 'right way' to leave a high-demand religious group, and you will have your own unique journey to walk. However, while the details may differ from person to person, this booklet has some useful things to consider.

We have put them into categories so that you can easily check over the main areas that are relevant to you. We have intentionally made this list quite comprehensive, but don't be overwhelmed! Most of us left without the aid of any such list and we survived – you don't need to tick off every single thing here. It's just a tool to help you to think through things.

Friends of the Olive Leaf Network, a charitable organisation which supports people leaving high-demand religious groups, created this document to support other leavers. We hope it helps and wish you the best in your own journey.

**A JOURNEY OF A
THOUSAND MILES
BEGINS WITH A
SINGLE STEP.**

- CHINESE PROVERB

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HIGH-DEMAND RELIGION?

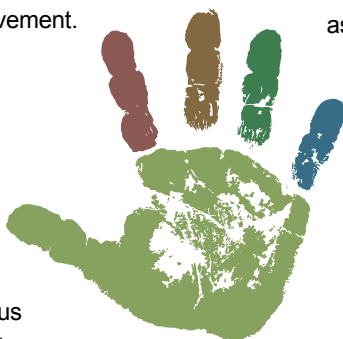
THE "HIGH-DEMAND HAND" OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS

RELATIONSHIPS

This includes biological family relationships, sexual/romantic relationships, friendships and social/community involvement.

LIFESTYLE

This includes a range of components of a person's life, including place of residence, living standards, morality, religious beliefs, and entertainment/recreation choices.



RESOURCES

This includes any asset that belongs to a person, including their finances as well as non-financial assets such as health, skills, time, property and personal effects.

EDUCATION

This refers to childhood/adolescent education, as well as graduate/post-graduate education, professional development and other adult education opportunities.

EMPLOYMENT

This refers broadly to a person's engagement in either paid work or unpaid work such as volunteering.

OLIVE LEAF NETWORK, 2023

The practices and beliefs of High-Demand Religious Groups deeply impact many areas of members' lives. As pictured left, these areas can be categorised into five key themes; Relationships, Resources, Lifestyle, Education and Employment.

Given that these five areas are what give shape to most members' ordinary and everyday lives, it means that the impact of the group's influence is felt on a daily and frequent basis.

This image depicts five common core areas of a person's life. When a person is in a High-Demand Religious Group, all five areas are strongly directed to by the group. Those who leave must go through a process of removing their 'fingers' from the grip of the group, and of reclaiming the self-efficacy of their own 'hand'.

**AM I IN A HIGH-DEMAND
RELIGIOUS GROUP?**

**TAKE A TWO-MINUTE
SURVEY BY SCANNING
THIS CODE.**





MOTIVES

WHY DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE?

WHAT ARE YOUR REASONS OR MOTIVATIONS?

WHAT ARE YOU EXCITED ABOUT?

WHAT ARE YOU FEARFUL ABOUT?

Having a clear understanding of your particular reasons for wanting to leave will help you to feel more confident in your decision. Being able to articulate them will help you in communication with others. A clear sense of purpose will help you to overcome the obstacles that will come your way.

"I AM A REALLY LOGICAL PERSON, SO I WROTE A LIST OF PROS AND CONS: THINGS I'D GAIN AND THINGS I'D LOSE. IT REALLY HELPED TO SEE THESE WRITTEN DOWN IN FRONT OF ME."

- ANON

"I DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO LEAVE BECAUSE I COULDN'T BEAR THE THOUGHT OF LOSING EVERYONE I KNEW. BUT IT BECAME CLEAR TO ME THAT I SIMPLY DIDN'T BELIEVE THE THINGS I WAS MEANT TO BELIEVE ANYMORE."

- ANON

"I HAD BEEN READING THE GOSPELS HEAPS, AND COULDN'T RECONCILE THE WAY JESUS LIVED WITH HOW WE WERE BEING TAUGHT TO LIVE. I WANTED TO BE FREE TO LIVE OUT MY FAITH ACCORDING TO WHAT I COULD SEE IN SCRIPTURE."

- ANON

"I HAD KNOWN I WAS GAY FOR A LONG TIME, AND KNEW I COULDN'T KEEP HIDING IT. I WANTED TO BE ABLE TO 'COME OUT' OF THE [GROUP] AND TO 'COME OUT' ABOUT MY SEXUAL ORIENTATION."

- ANON



FAMILY

Those who leave a high-demand religious group are often pressured into leaving their family environment, and once you have done so, your contact with family members is likely to become extremely limited.

Bearing that in mind, are there any family members who:

- You want to discuss your thoughts and plans with first? Or will you have to suddenly leave without discussing it?
- You would like to write letters to, particularly good-bye letters or letters explaining your thinking if you won't have a chance to explain in person?
- You would like to visit to say goodbye to (including extended family members), in case you are not able to see them again?
- You would like to ensure that you have photographs of/with?

If you are married, carefully consider the impact on your spouse.

- Are you able to discuss this with them?
- Are you prepared for your marriage to come under immense pressure?

If you have children, carefully consider the impact on them, especially if it is a possibility that your household may become divided.

- What ages are they?
- Are they in school and how might this impact that?
- How dependent on you are they?
- Would you be prepared to fight for custody of them?



COMMUNICATION ABILITY

You'll need to be able to communicate well with outsiders - perhaps even before you leave. Building a strong groundwork for communication will help you with setting up plans, support networks, and other needs.

- Have you got your own mobile phone and/or laptop, including internet data? It may be safer if these devices are not owned or operated by your religious group's leadership or administration arms.
- Would a PO box be useful for receiving mail privately, especially if your physical address is changing?
- It may be useful to have a free, secure email provider such as Proton Mail, Gmail, Hotmail, etc.
- Do you need to take precautions around communications to prevent others from discovering your plans? These precautions may include using secure forms of messaging, not leaving email accounts logged in, and changing your passwords regularly.
- Would it be beneficial to record anything while you are in there for your own safety, such as conversations, calls, or visits where you may feel unsafe or isolated?
You also may need to prove what was said later, especially in custody or business disputes.
- Get things in writing as much as possible! This is much safer than relying on verbal agreements.



SAFETY

If you are being coerced, threatened, or harmed in any way, or you're worried that you might be, then please reach out ASAP. There are several places you can ask for help:

- Contact the Olive Leaf Network, a support network for former members of high-demand religious groups. You will find them to be confidential and compassionate. See page 25 for ways to contact the Olive Leaf Network.
- Contact the Police or Social Services in your country – even if there is no crime involved, they are there to help in crises and will be able to connect you to the right services and supports.
- If you have access to the internet you may be able to find other organisations that help people in crisis. Even if they are not specifically for people leaving high-demand religious groups or so-called 'cults', most social support organisations will be able to connect you to someone who can help.
- You could also try reaching out to a neighbour, colleague or someone else in your immediate vicinity. Most people are kind and ready to help!

If someone else you know is being coerced, threatened or harmed in any way, we strongly encourage you to reach out to any of the above organisations or people.

Please seek help immediately if you are in danger, feeling suicidal, or know of someone else who may be at risk.

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO WOULD LOVE TO CARE FOR AND SUPPORT YOU, NO MATTER WHAT IS GOING ON!

TAKE A RISK AND REACH OUT.

**"THE WORLD IS INDEED
FULL OF PERIL, AND
IN IT THERE ARE
MANY DARK PLACES;
BUT STILL THERE IS
MUCH THAT IS FAIR,
AND THOUGH IN ALL
LANDS LOVE IS NOW
MINGLED WITH GRIEF,
IT GROWS PERHAPS
THE GREATER."**

- LORD OF THE RINGS

For Crisis and Emergency contacts, as well as other helpful organisations, see page 24–25.



FINANCES

- Have you got personal control over your own finances, e.g. bank account passwords and cards, and sole access to your own money?
- If you are married, consider the impact that leaving may have on things such as joint bank accounts, especially if you think your spouse may not leave with you.
- If you are a key part of a business or family trust, consider the impact that your leaving may have on this, especially if other trustees all remain in the high-demand religious group. There have been alleged instances of high-demand religious groups specifying that if a member leaves the group, their directorship, trustee status or even company shares are to be terminated. Usually, such clauses are not legally enforceable – seek legal advice well in advance of leaving.
- If you are a business owner who employs other members of a high-demand religious group and/or family members, seek legal advice well in advance of leaving, as this can create a complex situation for all parties.
- You may qualify for benefits and financial support under your country's social security structures. Contact relevant organisations in your country to seek advice as to what you might qualify for. Don't be shy – these organisations are specifically there to help people in situations beyond their control, just like you!

"ONCE I LEFT, FOR YEARS I HAD TO TAKE JOBS WHERE MY SALARY WAS MUCH LOWER THAN WHEN I WAS IN EMPLOYMENT IN THE [GROUP]. IT WAS HUMBLING, BUT ULTIMATELY BETTER FOR ME. I RETRAINED AND NOW I'M ON A GREATER SALARY THAN I HAD BACK THEN, AND IN A JOB OF MY OWN CHOOSING THAT I LOVE!"

- ANON

"I WAS PRETTY EMBARRASSED TO HAVE TO GO ON TO A SICKNESS BENEFIT WHEN I LEFT, BUT I WAS TOO TRAUMATISED TO HOLD DOWN A JOB. IT TOOK ME A YEAR BUT NOW I'M BACK ON MY FEET AND REALLY GRATEFUL FOR THE SOCIAL SUPPORT IN THIS COUNTRY."

- ANON

- Consider your assets, liabilities, income and expenditure:
 - > Do you have savings? Would you like to save more before you leave?
 - > Do you own significant assets such as a house or car that you could sell or rent to receive income?
 - > Do you own shares in any company or business? Will you keep or sell them?
 - > Are you paying a mortgage? Will you be able to keep up payments?
 - > Are you aware of how much income you'll need to provide for your basic needs (food, accommodation, internet data, etc.) and will your savings and/or job income be sufficient to cover these?

- Do not be pressured into making any significant financial decisions or signing any legally binding documents regarding your assets. Get support, get advice, and don't make big decisions under emotional duress or stress if you can possibly help it!

- Do you know how to manage your own money and to budget? Will you need to become more financially aware or to upskill yourself in personal money management? There are many free courses available on the internet or in most communities.



EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

- You may wish to stay in your current employment (even if it is for an employer who belongs to the high-demand religious group) and you are well within your legal rights to do so.
- It is illegal in most countries for an employer to fire you because your religious beliefs/practices differ from theirs. You should not be coerced or pressured to leave your employment because you have come under group discipline or excommunication.
- If you do stay in employment with the group after disaffiliation, be prepared for social ostracism and/or negative social pressure from those who are still members. This may be due to the other members' emotional response to your changes, or it may be behaviour required by the group's doctrines; especially if they practice ostracism/shunning of former members. Many former members find it too psychologically difficult to remain in close quarters with current members, so it may be best to have a backup plan.
 - Have you got a strategy or any clear goals to help you with finding future employment?
 - Accept that you might need to work in a short-term basic job to bring in an income, while you find your feet and work your way towards a career or job that you really want.
 - Have you got an up-to-date CV to help you in securing a new job? Templates can be found on the internet for free. Bear in mind that if your employer is a member of the

"WHEN I WAS IN THE [GROUP] YOU WERE NOT ALLOWED TO COMPLETE YEAR 13, LET ALONE GO TO UNIVERSITY. I COMPLETED A BUSINESS DEGREE WITH FIRST-CLASS HONOURS WHEN I WAS IN MY 50S. YOU ARE NEVER TOO OLD TO START AGAIN!"

- ANON

high-demand religious group, then they may not be suitable for putting as references on your CV. Is there anyone else such as a business acquaintance, teacher or friend who could provide references for you?

- Are there any night classes, tertiary-level study, or other forms of upskilling/further education that you may need to do to improve your employability? You may like to research these.
- The good news is that it is common these days for adults to make a change from previous employment, in order to seek change or to retrain. There are many former members of high-demand religious groups who have had their employment disrupted by leaving the group, but who have gone on to have very successful further education and employment opportunities.
- If possible, allow yourself a break of at least several weeks after leaving, before starting new employment - to give yourself time to adjust. Do not underestimate the traumatic impact that leaving can have on your wellbeing.

"I LEFT WITH BARELY ANY SAVINGS, AND NO QUALIFICATIONS OTHER THAN A YEAR 12 HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION. I ACCEPTED THAT I MIGHT HAVE TO START AT A REALLY BASIC LEVEL - TO CLEAN TOILETS OR WORK AT A FAST-FOOD JOINT IF NEED BE! FOR A WHILE I LITERALLY DID WORK AS A CLEANER, BUT I HAVE NO REGRETS. I LEARNT REAL SKILLS AND HOW TO WORK HARD FROM THE BOTTOM UP, INSTEAD OF HAVING THINGS HANDED TO ME ON A PLATE."

- ANON



SUPPORT NETWORKS

- Are there any relationships that you would like to establish for support before you leave? You might like to track down:
 - > a family member or friend who has already been excommunicated.
 - > an old schoolteacher.
 - > a business colleague.
 - > a neighbour.
- One of the best ways to connect with former members is via Facebook or other social media groups set up to help former members of high-demand religious groups connect with each other. Use the search function to enter keywords such as the name of your group or known acronyms for the group.
- If you don't want to join a social media group for fear of being found out, you could still privately message one of the group or page administrators. They are trusted people who will be able to connect you with others near you or who you may know.
- There are many online platforms, including social media, for connecting with others. Remember to be cautious when connecting with strangers online, even if they are relatives or other former members from your group. Never give out your physical location, bank account details or other important personal information unless you are absolutely sure it is someone you can trust.

**CHECK OUT PAGES
24-25 FOR SOME
REALLY HELPFUL
PLACES YOU
MIGHT LIKE TO
CONNECT WITH**

If you are new to unrestricted online activity, upskill yourself with regard to keeping safe online.

- Many ex-members are happy to hear from people who are leaving and need support. You'll find we are not as wicked or bitter as you may have been led to believe! Many of us can help with short or long-term accommodation, financial support, emotional support or simply friendship.
- You may wish to reach out to other specific support groups, for example:
 - > Local, mainstream churches.
 - > Community groups.
 - > LGBTI+ support groups.
 - > Disability support groups.
 - > Hobby groups where like-minded people may be keen to support you and offer friendship.
- There are other professional support people and organisations who can support you during your transition, such as:
 - > A professional counsellor or psychologist.
 - > Alcohol and/or drug support services.
 - > Life coaches.
 - > A spiritual advisor, church pastor or chaplain.

**YOU'LL BE SURPRISED HOW MUCH HELP AND SUPPORT
THAT PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO PROVIDE -
DON'T DO IT ALONE!**



MEDICAL / PHYSICAL / MENTAL HEALTH

Carefully consider your mental, physical, spiritual and emotional well-being. We strongly encourage you to connect with your medical doctor or another registered, trained health professional in your region to discuss your situation and receive support.

Be wary of any person or organisation, including registered health professionals, if you suspect that they are affiliated with or have a mutually beneficial relationship with your high-demand religious group or any of the group's leadership.

Physical Health

Do you have any physical health concerns? It may be a good idea to visit your doctor for a general check-up and to discuss your plans. They are bound by doctor-patient confidentiality and should treat any communication in total confidence. They may also recommend other avenues of support.

Mental Health

Do you have any mental health concerns? It may be wise to discuss these with your doctor and/or seek out mental health

support networks such as a counsellor or psychotherapist, well in advance of leaving. These can provide crucial bridging support during your leaving process.

Medication

If you are taking medication, ensure you have enough for whatever plans you are making, especially if you may not have access to your usual doctor for a while.

Surviving Abuse

Some people have experienced sexual, physical

or other forms of abuse, and addressing this can be a traumatic part of leaving. There are many social services that can offer assistance, including Police.

Sexual Health

Society's views towards sex are often different to those of high-demand religious groups, especially if those groups are conservative and/or patriarchal. Keep yourself safe and remember that consent is key. Your doctor is a safe and confidential person to discuss sexual health with at any time.

Addictions

Do you have any addictions that may negatively affect your new life? You may wish to seek professional help before, during and after leaving to make sure you stay in a good place.

A Will and Executors

Do you have an up-to-date will? This is especially

important if you have a spouse, children, your own business or significant financial assets. It is also important that you specify executors of your will, as well as your body/funeral arrangements. Otherwise, in the event of your death, these important decisions could be made by next-of-kin who don't respect your wishes.

Family Health History

Is there any family history of medical or mental health problems that would be good for you to know about? You may have restricted access to this kind of information once you have gone, so find out now if you can.

Health Records

Have you got copies of any relevant health records? These might include operations you've had, your baby book, and vaccinations, etc.



VALUES, MORALS & SPIRITUALITY

One of the biggest changes in leaving a high-demand group is that your values, morals and spirituality will be your own choice instead of being set for you by others. You might like to reflect on what core values, morals and key truths you would like to build your life upon once leaving. These questions might help:

- What are some core values, morals and principles by which you want to live your life? It might help to create a short list that can help guide your life and decisions in the future.
- What kinds of friends and relationships do you want in your new life? Where could you proactively look to find people who have similar values or beliefs to you?
- Leaving the group doesn't mean you have to give up all of its values. For example, faith might still be important to you, and something you can lean on through your journey. The key difference is that you will be free to decide for yourself rather than having your beliefs dictated. Are there practices of reading or prayer that might help you? Can you connect with other people of faith, who can support you and be a sounding board for your religious/spiritual questions?
- A significant part of the leaving journey is having the freedom and courage to think through all these kinds of things as you examine your life, beliefs and values. It can feel overwhelming, especially if you are used to your group providing you with all the 'answers'. Remember that determining your own beliefs, theology and values doesn't all have to be done before leaving - questions and decisions about these areas of our lives are something to be navigated over a lifetime.
- Is there any research about other religious beliefs, or agnosticism, humanism or atheism that you

would like to do before leaving? Are there any organisations you'd like to join to help you to explore the spiritual dimension of your life?

- You will encounter people who hold different beliefs, which can be confronting after living in a community where spiritual and political beliefs are shared. Be courteous and polite and treat others with respect. It's ok to disagree.

**"...ONE THING I DO:
FORGETTING WHAT
IS BEHIND AND
STRAINING TOWARD
WHAT IS AHEAD,
I PRESS ON
TOWARD THE GOAL
TO WIN THE PRIZE
FOR WHICH GOD
HAS CALLED ME..."**

**- APOSTLE PAUL
PHILIPPIANS 3:13**



PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Here are a bunch of practical things to consider!

- Have you got access to transport? If you don't have a driver's licence or your own car, would it be helpful to get one?
- What are the bare essentials you need to take with you when you leave? E.g. wallet, phone, passport, birth certificate or other identity documents. If possible, ensure you have a soft copy (computer), as well as hard copies.

- What else might you want to take with you?

Create a list, e.g.

- > Sentimental items such as personal documents, letters, photographs.
- > Clothing – you'll need much less than you might think!
- > Books.
- > Family heirlooms or special treasures that belong to you.
- > Don't bother taking things that you can easily replace!

"I KNEW I COULDN'T FACE THE PRESSURE THAT WOULD COME ON ME IF I ANNOUNCED I WAS LEAVING, BEFORE I ACTUALLY DID. I DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE PRIESTLIES AND TO BE SHUT-UP IN ISOLATION FOR AGES... SO I PACKED A FEW ESSENTIALS AND JUST WALKED OUT OF THERE ONE DAY."

- ANON

-
- What kind of timing would be best for leaving? Consider:
 - > Impact on any education programme and/or employment situation in which you're involved.
 - > Impact on family members including things like upcoming exams of siblings/children, upcoming weddings/funerals etc.
 - > While you will never be able to choose a 'good time', there are some times that are more disruptive than others.
 - How much notice you would like to give family, friends, and other community members of your group. None? Months? Weigh up the pros and cons.
 - Where will you go at first? Accommodation on your own, or would you like to go to safe-housing networks, former members, or friends?
 - Who will help you? Is there anyone who you would like to pick you up, help to transport your stuff, or simply be there for moral support when you actually leave? We strongly recommend having someone else physically there with you when you leave, as it is very traumatic and you may be under immense pressure.

"I'M A DELIBERATIVE, THOROUGH PERSON. BEFORE LEAVING, I SPENT MONTHS MAKING NEW CONTACTS ON THE OUTSIDE, READING SCRIPTURE TO SOLIDIFY MY BELIEFS, WRITING LETTERS TO ALL MY EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS, AND HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH THE [ELDERS] ASSIGNED TO VISIT ME. IT WAS TERRIBLY LONG, SLOW AND PAINFUL BUT AT THE END I FELT SATISFIED."

- ANON



CRISIS SUPPORT & OTHER HELPFUL PLACES

For help in crises or emergencies, call:

Argentina

911 for Emergencies as well as non-emergencies

Australia

000 for Emergencies and 131 444 for non-emergencies

Canada

911 for Emergencies as well as non-emergencies

Caribbean

911 for Emergencies

France

112 for Emergencies as well as non-emergencies

Germany

110 for Emergencies and 311 for non-emergencies

Italy

113 for Emergencies as well as non-emergencies

Jamaica

119 for Emergencies

New Zealand

111 for Emergencies and 105 for non-emergencies

Sweden

112 for Emergencies and 114 for non-emergencies

Switzerland

117 for Emergencies and 143 for psychological support

United Kingdom

999 for Emergencies or 101 for non-emergencies

United States

911 for Emergencies and 311 for non-emergencies

We recommend contacting the Olive Leaf Network via their website or social media platforms. The Olive Leaf Network provides aid and advocacy for former members of high-demand religious groups, in particular for those who leave the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (Exclusive Brethren).

Website: oliveleaf.network

Facebook & Instagram: Olive Leaf Network

Below is a list of other organisations who may be able to support you. We don't have places listed for every country globally, but many of them have resources that are helpful for wherever you are from around the world. Some of them are specifically for supporting people leaving high-demand groups or cults. Others are more generic, but will still be able to help connect you to avenues of support, depending on your specific needs.

Please note that we cannot vouch for every aspect of what each of these organisations provide; please use your wisdom and discernment when using any of them.

We also strongly encourage you to reach out to your medical doctor or to other registered, trained health professionals in your region. Be wary of any person, including any health professionals, if you suspect that they are affiliated with, or have a mutually beneficial relationship with, the group you are attempting to leave or any of the group's leadership personnel.

Argentina

Teléfono de la Esperanza- Argentina
Tel: 902 500 002

Australia

<https://mind.se> or
<http://www.cifs.org.au/> or
<http://cultconsulting.org/>

Canada

<https://cmha.ca> or
<https://infosecte.org/>

Europe – general

www.fecris.org

France

www.unadfi.org or
vigil-sectes.org

New Zealand

Free call or text 1737 for support from a trained counsellor or
<https://www.cultwatch.com/>

Sweden

<https://mind.se>

United Kingdom

<http://www.catalystcounselling.org.uk> or
<https://www.hopevalleycounselling.com>

United States

<https://www.icsahome.com> or
<https://www.stronger-after.org>

WE WISH YOU WELL IN YOUR JOURNEY!

There will never be a perfect time to leave – there are always risks when we step into something new, and there will always be grief when we give things up to gain something else. People often stay in high-demand religious groups because of the ‘three Fs’ (Fear, Family, and Finance). But there is another ‘F’ that you can choose – the priceless gift of FREEDOM!

**"TO GAIN THAT WHICH IS
WORTH HAVING, IT MAY
BE NECESSARY TO LOSE
EVERYTHING ELSE."**

**- BERNADETTE DEVLIN,
1969**

**Former Brethren
members recall being
told by their leaders:
"We'll do the thinking,
you do the doing."
We reckon it's time for
a new saying:
**"YOU DO THE THINKING,
AND THE DOING!"****

**REMEMBER –
REACH OUT!
Dare to connect with
others before you
leave. You will find that
there are many kind
people from all sorts
of places who will be
willing to support you.**