A Summary of The Two by Twos

The Two by Twos, also known as the "Cooneyites" or the "Christian Conventions," is a global religious sect that originated in Ireland in the late 19th century. The group is known for its belief in evangelism and the practice of "two by two" evangelism, where members, known as workers, go out in pairs to spread their beliefs to others.

The Two by Twos hold weekly meetings on Sundays and Wednesdays, during which they use hymns and Bible readings as part of their worship. While the group has no central leadership or hierarchy, they do have assigned head workers or overseers over a given region who are responsible for the members and regular workers within that region.

The Two by Twos believe that they are the only true church and that their form of worship is the only correct way to worship God. However, they reject the doctrine of the Trinity but do not necessarily reject the divinity of Jesus. They also reject the use of traditional church buildings and the ordination of ministers.

The Two by Twos have a global presence, operating in nearly every country, although the majority of their members reside in just a few countries, including the US, Canada, and Australia. Despite their small size, the group has faced criticism and controversy over their beliefs and practices, and some former members have accused the group of being a cult. It is worth noting that the group's founder, William Irvine, was excommunicated from the sect, and most Two by Twos are unaware of his existence.

Understanding Terminology

Names

'The Two by Twos' - This is not a term that is accepted by the group itself. It was created based on the fact that workers within the sect almost always travel in pairs of twos. The term is mostly used by outsiders and ex-members when referring to the sect. Generally it is accepted as the most accurate descriptor.

'Cooneyites' - This term was created during the early days of the Two by Twos when Edward Cooney was one of the most prominent workers within the sect. However, the term is no longer an accurate descriptor of the Two by Twos, as Edward Cooney was eventually excommunicated from the sect and went on to have his own followers, who are now referred to as the Cooneyites. Even while he was part of the Two by Twos, Edward Cooney reportedly disliked the name "Cooneyites" and preferred to be referred to by other titles.

'Black Stockings' - This term was created as a descriptor during the early days of the Two by Twos sect, when women were expected to wear black stockings as part of their modest attire. However, this requirement is no longer in place, and the term "Black Stockings" is no longer a well-known or accurate descriptor of the Two by Twos. Today, members of the sect are expected to dress modestly, but the specific clothing requirements may vary from place to place and are not as rigid as they once were. The term "Black Stockings" is now largely forgotten and is not commonly used when referring to the Two by Twos.

'Go-Preachers' - This term is potentially the closest thing that the Two by Twos have ever recognized as an official name, as it was used in the sect's original hymnbook. The name refers to the workers within the Two by Twos, who travel from home to home preaching and evangelising. The term "go-preachers" emphasises the itinerant nature of the workers' ministry, as they are constantly on the move. However, the term is no longer commonly used either by ex-members and outsiders or by people within the Two by Twos.

'The Truth or The Way' - While the workers within the Two by Twos deny that the sect has any official name, nearly all English-speaking members of the group refer to it as "The Truth" or "The Way." This terminology is commonly used by ex-members who once belonged to the sect, but prefer not to consider it an accurate descriptor given the many controversies that surround the Two by Twos. These ex-members often recognize that "The Truth" is not an accurate descriptor of the sect, given the various accusations and criticisms that have been levelled against the Two by Twos over the years.

Structure of Members -

'The Friends' - Refers to all members of the group. This term is used as a way of identifying fellow members and as a general way of referring to the group as a whole.

'Professing' - refers to the act of publicly declaring one's faith and commitment to the group. In order to speak and pray during a meeting, a member must profess their faith. This is typically done when a worker announces that a gospel meeting or convention meeting will be "tested," and members are asked to stand during a certain portion of a hymn. There is no specific age at which a member is expected to profess, although it is most common for members to do so between the ages of 10 and 12. Professing members are not allowed to participate in communion until they have been baptised.

'Baptism' - Refers to a rite of passage that signifies a member's commitment to the group. Baptism takes place at conventions, although in some cases where a suitable baptism pond is not available, separate arrangements may be made, often in the private homes of members using a pool. The age at which a member is baptised can vary from region to region, but it is most common for members to be baptised during their teenage years. The Two by Twos reject the practice of sprinkling for baptism and believe in fully submerging the individual being baptised. They also do not baptise infants. Once a member is baptised, they are considered to be a fully committed servant of God and are eligible to participate in communion.

'Elders' - In the Two by Twos, an "elder" is a member who is responsible for leading a specific church or meeting. If a worker is present for an in-home meeting, they will typically take on the majority of the responsibilities that the elder would normally have during that meeting. Elders uphold the structure of the in-home meetings and are responsible for starting and ending the service. They are the last to speak and pray during the meeting and are also responsible for leading communion. Sunday meetings are typically held in the home of the elder. Elders are expected to be respected and followed by other members of the group.

'The Workers' - Refers to members who have been given the responsibility of spreading the group's beliefs to others. Workers are considered to be the equivalent of ministers in other religious organisations and are expected to dedicate themselves fully to spreading the group's message. Workers usually travel in pairs, and go from home to home. These pairs are always made up of members of the same gender, with sister workers paired with other sister workers and brother workers paired with other brother workers. There is a hierarchy within the group of workers, with brother workers generally being considered to be of higher esteem than sister workers.

'Overseers' - Refers to a leader who is responsible for all workers and members within a given region, which can be a state or multiple states. In smaller countries or in areas where the group is not as well-established, an overseer may be appointed to oversee the entire country. Overseers are always male members, and are generally senior workers who have

been part of the ministry for many years. They are responsible for overseeing the work of the other workers and members within their region and providing guidance and direction to the group.

'Head Overseer' - Refers to a leader who is responsible for all overseers within a specific area. The only known example of head overseers is in the US, where there is a head overseer for the eastern US. At one point there was a head overseer of the western US, however now this role is split among several different overseers. A head overseer is in charge of all overseers within their designated area and also has a region of their own that they are responsible for. It is not believed there are head overseers in other parts of the world with the exception of Australia, but it is possible that some form of hierarchy exists within overseers in such areas as well.

'Lost-out' - A term used to refer to people who have attended meetings at some point in their lives but are no longer active members. Members of the Two by Twos often prefer to believe that these individuals will return to the group at some point in the future. Ex-members are often held to a higher standard than outsiders who are not familiar with the Two by Twos and are expected to adhere to the group's teachings and beliefs, even if they no longer believe or agree with them.

The Structure and Types of 'Meetings'

'Fields' - Refers to a subregion within an overseer's larger region. Each field is typically assigned two workers, who are responsible for spreading the group's message within that field. A field is generally made up of a city or multiple towns and typically has a minimum of 100 members. The workers assigned to a field are responsible for organising meetings, providing spiritual guidance to members, and arranging 'gospel meetings' within that field.

'Meetings' - Refers to service held in members' homes on Wednesdays and Sundays. These meetings generally have a small attendance, with 10-25 people in attendance. Meetings are typically one hour long. Wednesday meetings are more casual than Sunday meetings and resemble a Bible study, with all members speaking on the same topic. The way topics are assigned for these studies can vary depending on the region. Communion is not taken during Wednesday meetings, and the location of the meeting alternates weekly between the homes of different members within a given church. Members are generally expected to dress somewhat formally for these meetings, although the dress code is generally more relaxed than on Sunday. Sunday meetings are more formal, with members speaking on topics of their own choosing and communion being taken. The dress code for Sunday meetings is generally more formal, and these meetings are always held at the home of the elder.

Common Structure:

Hymn
Prayer
Hymn

Speaking Period
Communion (if sunday)
Hymn

'Union Meetings' - Refers to a special Sunday meeting that occurs once a month and brings together multiple churches within a field. These meetings are typically held in a member's home and are larger in size than regular Sunday meetings, generally with around 30 people in attendance. Despite their larger size, union meetings are expected to last for only an hour, so members are expected to speak briefly. Occasionally, an elder may cut the service short if time is running over and not allow all members to speak. Union meetings generally follow the same rules and practices as regular Sunday meetings, although some regions may have different traditions and practices.

'Gospel Meetings' - Refers to meetings that are held to encourage members to profess their faith and to attract new members to the group. Gospel meetings often occur when there are no other obligations for workers in place and are held at venues or halls, although they may also be held on private property if the owner has a large enough space. Gospel meetings generally take place on Wednesdays and Sundays, although they may also be held on other days of the week depending on the availability of venues and the discretion of the workers. The size of gospel meetings can vary greatly, but they typically have at least 100 people in attendance. The purpose of gospel meetings is to encourage members to profess their faith if they have not done so already and to attract new members, although these goals are not always achieved. Workers will 'test' the meeting if they believe someone will 'profess'.

Common Structure:
Worker 1 Prayer
Hymn
Worker 1 Sermon
Hymn (asked to stand for hymn)
Worker 2 Sermon
Hymn (If tested, professing members will stand for a portion of this hymn)
Worker 2 Prayer

'Special Meetings' - Refers to large-scale events that are held in an overseer's region at large venues. These meetings are attended by all workers within the region, as well as visiting workers from other states or countries. Special meetings are different from gospel meetings in that they are intended for fellowship and spiritual growth rather than evangelism. They typically consist of two, two-hour meetings with an hour-long lunch break in between. Three workers usually speak at each meeting, although the number can vary. Workers start the prayer, but members are then able to participate and are invited to stand and speak when the microphone is passed to them. Special meetings can vary in size, with 200-500 being a fairly common attendance. A testimony period is also held during these meetings, during which regular members can stand and share their thoughts when the microphone is passed to them. A brother worker is designated to "take" a special meeting, meaning they are responsible for upholding the structure of the meeting, while sister workers are not allowed to "take" a

special meeting. Special meetings require a significant amount of planning and can be costly to organise.

Common Structure:
Hymn
Worker Prayer
Member Prayer
Hymn
Worker Sermon
Hymn
Worker Sermon
Hymn (asked to stand)
Testimony Period
Hymn
Worker Sermon
Hymn and/or Grace

'Conventions' - Conventions within the Two by Twos are large events that occur annually on private property. Each Overseer region has several conventions, which usually range in size from 300 to 1000 members. Most members choose to stay on the convention property, either in provided sleeping dorms, trailers, or tents, or they choose to stay in nearby hotels. Conventions are typically four days long, and meals are provided at no cost to attendees. These meals typically include breakfast, lunch, and supper, with additional snacking periods available throughout the day. Common buildings and structures at an average convention include a meeting shed or tent (where services or meetings are held), men's and women's sleeping dorms, a dining shed or tent, a cookhouse, a laundry facility, workers' sleeping dorms, washrooms and showering areas, a first-aid facility, and more. Before each convention, there is a period of preparation known as "preps," during which members travel to the convention property to provide labour in order to get the site ready for the event. Food is generally supplied to all those who help during the preparation period. Conventions provide an opportunity for members of the Two by Twos to come together, fellowship, and participate in religious services and teachings.

The day-to-day structure of conventions typically begins with breakfast, which is held early in the morning. About two hours after breakfast, the first fellowship meeting takes place. This meeting follows the same structure as "special meetings" and lasts for two hours. After the first meeting, lunch is served, and then there is a two-hour break before the second fellowship meeting, which follows the same structure as the first. Finally, after another break, a one-hour gospel meeting takes place, during which members are encouraged to "profess" if they have not already done so. Conventions usually have a curfew of 10 o'clock, and in some cases, workers will patrol the grounds to ensure that no one is still awake. On Saturday evening, the meeting is "tested," and members are given the opportunity to "profess." Conventions are often where the largest number of members choose to profess. On Sunday morning, if any members wish to be baptised, a baptism service is held. This involves walking to the baptism pond, where a worker will pray, a hymn will be sung, and the member(s) will be baptised by

full immersion. Typically there are only two meetings on Sundays, in order to allow members ample time to leave the convention grounds and head home.
Conventions are very costly and require a lot of planning. Many of the wealthier members, or "friends," donate large sums of money in order for the conventions to operate. A few workers from around the globe typically travel to the conventions in a given region. During the conventions, many members volunteer for various jobs, such as working in the cookhouse, washing dishes, taking out garbage, serving tables, and more. Conventions are instrumental in helping the Two by Twos to retain membership, and on almost any given week, at least one convention is taking place somewhere in the world. (See Gospel Meetings and Special Meetings for service structure)

Rules, Practices, and Traditions

Day-to-day Rules and Expectations

No Television - This started as a rule against radio, then progressed to TV. This rule is often one of the most well-known facts about the group. As streaming platforms and the internet became more popular, many members started getting computers, which resulted in the television rule being enforced less and less. In most parts of the world where the Two by Twos have a prominent presence, it is now not uncommon for members to have Netflix subscriptions and watch videos on YouTube, often on laptops, tablets, or phones. However, many members still keep their TVs hidden from plain sight.

No Alcohol or Drugs - In no area are drugs beyond medical use considered acceptable. In most areas, alcohol is not allowed to any extent, and it is rare for members to be active abusers. However, in some places, specifically some European countries, alcohol is permitted, and it has even been served during lunch at Italian special meetings.

Modest Dress and Style - Men often have far fewer restrictions on what they are allowed to wear compared to women. Requirements for women often include no jewellery (exceptions for wedding and engagement rings have now been made, but it used to be common to have engagement watches instead of rings), only dresses or skirts, no low-cut tops, no short bottoms, and no makeup. These restrictions have loosened in recent years, and it is now common for younger women to wear pants and shorts, as well as makeup, outside of meetings. However, the jewellery requirement is still largely in place. The main requirement for men is to have no beard and to have short hair, but these requirements are not strictly enforced. Even though restrictions on clothing are more relaxed than they used to be, workers are still often critical of women who do not dress modestly or who wear makeup.

Clean Language - Cursing is not allowed. Some members also prefer not to use language that replaces cursing, such as "heck" or "dang." Some members will not read books or watch shows if they contain too many curse words. Members are also not allowed to use God's name in a way that is disrespectful or irreverent (Oh my God, oh Lord, etc). Using God's name in this way is considered to be a sin in the Two by Twos and is strictly prohibited. Members are expected to show respect for God's name and to use it only in a way that is considered appropriate and respectful.

Restrict Outsider Relations - Workers often encourage members to be outside of mainstream society and to avoid becoming too comfortable with "worldly" people. Workers and members often encourage this, and parents often try to ensure that their children develop friendships within the Two by Twos and discourage friendships with those who are not a part of the sect.

While it is not against the rules, marriage to an outsider is taboo and discouraged within the Two by Twos.

Restrict Non-godly Activities - The workers encourage members to restrict non-godly activities and to prioritise anything "godly" above everything else, including family and friends. Workers generally encourage members to spend their time on activities that are constructive to a "godly life" and to avoid spending too much time on anything that isn't. The Two by Twos strongly believe that a "godly" life should be the primary focus of their members.

Relationship Rules and Expectations

No Premarital Sex - This is likely one of the most standard and agreed-upon rules among all members. All members are expected to wait until marriage to have sexual relations. In most cases, if a premarital pregnancy occurs, the members will not be excommunicated, but they are often expected to re-profess, generally after the baby is born. This rule likely results in many Two by Twos getting married very young, often in their early 20s, and sometimes even in their late teenage years.

The Male is Dominant - The Two by Twos have a cultural norm that requires women to submit to men in relationships. The group strongly believes in traditional gender roles in marriage, as laid out in the Bible, and expects women to listen to their husbands and to follow their lead in disagreements. The male is considered to have the final say in these situations. While this is the most common belief among workers and members, individual marriages may vary in terms of the dynamics between partners.

No Same-Sex Relationships - The group does not agree with gay marriage or same-sex relationships, believing that they go against the teachings of the Bible. However, over time, some workers and members have become more sympathetic towards gay people, and some workers now acknowledge that people can be gay but consider it a challenge from the devil that must be resisted. Workers generally try to be apolitical and do not have an official stance on the legality of gay marriage. However, it is not uncommon for members to think it should be illegal, though a growing portion of younger members are less opposed to it being legal.

Divorce and Remarriage - Divorce and remarriage are some of the most controversial topics within the Two by Twos. Overseers have never fully agreed on the proper course of action in these situations, and there have even been disputes over what the correct action is. Divorce is heavily discouraged, but is still often seen as forgivable. Members who get divorced are usually allowed to continue participating in meetings, although there have been instances where some members have been excommunicated or told to no longer speak or pray in meetings. Remarriage is a particularly controversial issue, with many members disagreeing on the proper course of action. The only cases where divorce and then remarriage is seen as acceptable are if the original spouse died or committed adultery. In many areas, remarriage

often results in members no longer being allowed to take part in meetings, and in some cases they may be excommunicated. In other areas, workers continue to allow them to participate fully, although they may be warned that this does not mean that God will not judge them.

On Birth Control and Abortion - The Two by Twos seem to have no official stance on birth control or abortion. Birth control is not often discussed among members, but it is generally accepted within the group. However, abortion is a more controversial topic, and the prevailing view among members is likely to be pro-life. There is no official position on this issue within the group, and individual members may hold a range of views on the matter.

Rules and Expectations For Workers

Travel Two by Two **-** This rule mandates that their ministers (workers) must always travel in pairs. This is one of the core parts of the group's belief system and is based on the passage in Luke 10:1 that describes Jesus sending out his disciples two by two. Exceptions are made if there is an uneven number of workers available, but male and female workers are never paired together. The belief behind this rule is that travelling in pairs provides support and accountability for the workers and helps to ensure that they are able to effectively spread their message to others.

Limited Possessions - This is another essential belief of the group, which holds that workers should have next to no possessions and should rely on the generosity of others for their basic needs. Most often, a worker will only take one suitcase with them on their travels, although the amount of possessions that workers are allowed to take with them has increased over time. In addition to clothing and toiletries, workers now commonly have smartphones, tablets, laptops, and possibly items for hobbies and interests. Workers generally seem to uphold this standard fairly well, although there have been controversies when members have learned that certain workers have possessions such as properties, vehicles, and other large items. It is also now a common belief that the Overseers have large funds, often kept in the name of trusted members, and that workers may have even purchased some convention grounds in certain scenarios to ensure that they remain within Two by Two possession. Most members are either not aware of such funds or do not discuss them. Workers also commonly have a set of members who will store possessions for them within their homes, although these possessions are generally still a small amount. Normally, within a given field workers are provided a vehicle, though they do not own them.

Homeless and Never Idle - Workers rarely have a designated home, with the only exceptions being those who are in medical care facilities or those who are in areas where there are no members to provide them with a home, and therefore must rent somewhere to stay. Workers are expected to constantly move from home to home, and generally will not stay in one place for more than a few days. This means that workers are rarely given time to see their families, and when they do visit with other members, they generally can only stay for a few days at a time. One of the few times that workers stay in the same place for an extended period of time

is during preparations for conventions, when some workers will stay on the convention property to assist with setting up for the event.

Celibacy - While Overseers rarely admit that workers are not allowed to marry, it is widely believed within the group that married people were, and can be, ministers (workers) according to the Bible. However, many years ago, Overseers mandated that married couples could no longer be allowed in the work. It is unclear why this decision was made, but it could be because it was difficult to manage, especially if a worker couple had a child, or because they believed it was ungodly. Regardless of the reason, the last married couple of workers died several years ago, and no one has been, and unless something changes, will be admitted as a married couple within the work again.

Everything To a Higher Extent - Workers in the Two by Twos must abide by all of the rules that regular members are expected to follow, but to an even higher extent. For example, workers dress more modestly than regular members. Sister workers wear clothing that covers nearly their entire body, and brother workers often wear suits and dress shirts, never wearing casual clothing. Sister workers also wear their hair up in buns or other allowing hairstyles. In addition to their appearance, workers are expected to prioritise their relationship with God even more than regular members. They often spend long periods reading the Bible and praying, and when speaking with them, they often try to reference God and the spiritual aspect of everything.

Rules and Expectations For Children

Silence - Unlike many churches, the Two by Twos mandate that children attend the exact same services as adults. There was once a Sunday school created for Two by Twos in the early history of the sect, but the project was quickly scrapped when the workers found out. When a child is in any of the meetings, they are expected to be still and quiet from a very young age. Children who "act out," generally by moving around too much or making too much noise, will often be taken out of the meeting and punished. When a worker is visiting a home, children are expected to be on their best behaviour and are generally expected to be silent unless an adult speaks to them. Before a meeting begins, all members wait in silence for it to commence, and children are expected to adhere to this rule as well.

Godly Activities and Spiritual Behaviour - In the Two by Twos, children are expected to take an interest in God from a young age. Parents often begin reading the Bible to their children from a young age, and children are expected to learn the habit of reading their Bible at least once a day and praying at least once in the morning and once at night. As children get a little older, they are taught that salvation is their responsibility, and that they must profess in order to have a place in eternity. It is unclear at what age workers believe children become responsible for themselves, but some workers have given sermons about children in their pre-teen years who have died before professing, and how they could not offer hope because of it.