

Update from Guillermo Adame

Guillermo Adame - Monday, April 14, 2003

An Open Letter to both current and former members of the Southwest Family of Churches (San Diego, Phoenix, Tucson, Las Vegas, Reno, Salt Lake City, Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Tijuana and Mexicali)

My Dearest Brothers & Sisters,

Recent History

Matthew 22:37-38

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

The above Scripture has been a defining principle for my Christian life. I'm grateful that God loves me with all of his heart and for the incredible sacrifice that He made for me! This week (April 8) I celebrated my 23rd spiritual birthday. I'm very grateful that God has showered His love on me. I called Kip McKean to thank him for his help in studying the Bible and pouring out his life in helping me to become a Christian. I will forever be grateful. It is sobering to reflect on what my life would be without Christ. I'm grateful for the many incredible blessings that I have received from God.

Next month will mark the completion of my 10th year of serving the Lord here in San Diego. Terry and I count these past 10 years as some of the most incredible of our lives. Last November 4th, I preached a sermon entitled "Growing Up" at a meeting of the entire congregation at the San Diego Convention Center. I shared that we have matured as a congregation but that we needed to grow even more in our love, wisdom, and strength in the Lord. We studied about the church at Corinth and all of the sins and weaknesses that congregation had and realized that we still had much to repent of here in San Diego.

A week later I attended the life changing and historic Unity Meeting in Los Angeles. The resignation of the McKean's was accepted. The openness and challenging of the structure of leadership were addressed. Incredible decisions were made. There is no longer a World Sector Discipling group making decisions for the churches. There are no longer World Sector Leaders. We will work together in love and unity for the common goal of seeing the world won for Christ but we will do this with loving persuasion and not authoritative demands. We left the meeting in LA with a resolve to stay unified and to love one another deeply.

Terry and I knew that we needed to have the same type of meeting with the same spirit of openness with the church leaders of the Southwest U.S. In December, we met with all of the church leaders as well as all of the Evangelist and their wives. Terry and I apologized and asked forgiveness for the many sins of our leadership. We then met with all of the Bible Talk Leaders of the San Diego Church on January 12th to apologize to them. Jerry and Terry Jordan also apologized for their sins. We then met with the deacons the following week to get their input and thoughts. Over the course of the following two weeks the Jordans, Adames, Steve Smith, Mays & Matzels attended open family meetings for each of the 7 regions of the church. The Adames and Jordans asked for forgiveness and apologized to each of the members at those meetings. As I listened to many share how they were affected by harsh and abusive leadership we were brought to tears and a great soberness of conviction filled our hearts that we have not fulfilled the greatest commandments in the Bible. For that I am truly sorry! We are grateful for the grace, mercy and forgiveness that we have received from everyone. For those of you who were not in attendance and for those who were at one time members of the San Diego Church of Christ I want to put a summary of my talk here for you to read:

Personal Apology

I'd like to share a few scriptures that have pricked my heart.

Jeremiah 49.16

16 The terror you inspire and the pride of your heart have deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks, who occupy the heights of the hill. Though you build your nest as high as the eagle's, from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD.

Prov 16.18

18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

James 4.6

6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

The Sin of Pride has been my sin that I need to apologize for. I have allowed pride to cause me to think of myself more highly than I ought. I have sought the praise of man more than the praise of God and I have allowed this sin of pride to produce the following:

1. Not protecting the churches in San Diego and the Southwest. These churches have been incredibly sacrificial. We have sent hundreds of people as well as millions of dollars to support missions and ministries around the world. However, our churches have been hurt so that others could be built up. We have lacked people and funds for our teen, campus, singles and other ministries.

2. Not providing a forum for people to be heard and to feel respected. Many were told that they were critical or rebellious or not spiritual when they brought up things that they didn't feel good about.

3. The pressure to grow. The use of statistics to motivate. People were getting baptized when they were not ready. I put an ungodly pressure on leaders who in turn put an ungodly pressure on their people.

4. People were made to feel unimportant, unspiritual, and sinful for not baptizing someone they met and studied with. I'm sorry. It is wrong and unbiblical. Over the past two years we have begun to get rid of the bad motivation of stats. I'm truly sorry for any disrespect that you have felt for not feeling successful as a Christian.

5. People were made to feel sinful and horrible if they didn't take advice. For example, many were pressured not to move from San Diego even though there were good reasons to move. Others were driven out of the church if they didn't agree with how things were done or with the structure of leadership. That's over. I'm truly sorry. I ask that you visit us again and give the church and myself a chance to prove our repentance to you.

6. Humiliation of people and ministries. There was an unhealthy competition between the different regions of the church. Some regions and churches were made to feel like "spare-parts" ministries or like "second class citizens." We began to follow man and forgot about working together as a family in glorifying God. I am truly sorry to the Singles Ministry. Your needs were discounted, your schedule was made to seem unimportant and your ministry was given a lesser priority than the teens, campus, married or other ministries. I'm truly sorry!

7. The women's role. Terry, my wife, apologized for not teaching and emphasizing the amazing role God has given women when you become wives and mothers and that you should feel great about this role taking priority. She also apologized for focusing more on stats and growth than on the fact that as God's daughters, you are loved and have great worth in His sight.

8. Please, please know that I, as well as the rest of the leadership of the San Diego church, am deeply convicted and sobered by how our hearts became hard. We are determined to radically repent as we strive to restore trust among God's people. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

Repentance & Change

I would like to give you an update of the many things that have begun to change. We are getting back to motivating people from the Bible and with a deep conviction that comes from the heart and not just actions.

1) Decisions & Leadership (Matthew 20:25-26)

a) Deacons. We are getting more and more people involved in the decision-making processes of the church. I'm so excited about the deacons and elders of the church. They will be involved and help influence decisions. Two years ago we had only 4 deacons in the San Diego Church. Today we have 30 deacons who, along with their wives, are providing incredible advice, service and support to the disciples. More will be added this year.

b) Elders. I'm grateful for our elders and elders' wives. They serve tirelessly for the congregation. I have apologized specifically to Jerry Jordan and Jim Mays for not seeking their wisdom as they have been given the responsibility of oversight of the church here. Dennis Matzel was appointed an elder at the end of December. He is a man full of grace and truth. We are blessed to have these men along with their wives who love God with all of their hearts serving in this capacity. My goal is to see more elders raised up so that we can have at least one per region. The evangelist and elders will work together (with much advice) to make the ministry decisions for the church here.

c) Core Groups. Each of the regional evangelists and staffs have, along with their regions, chosen non-staff men and women who will help them lead in their respective regions.

2) Money issues. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

a) The SDCC Board of Directors is taking a more definitive role in the review of budgets and where the money goes. I'm excited as well as relieved because it will be a great protection to all of us here.

b) A financial advisory committee has also been appointed to advise the ministry staff as well as the Board of Directors. Each of these people, one per region, has been selected by their people to represent them. I'm grateful for the hours that they have already sacrificed to see that there will no longer be any secrecy as to how money is used in the SDCC. Once a new budget is decided upon a presentation will be made to the entire congregation.

c) Salary Compensation Review Committee. The Board of Directors has taken nominations and will decide upon a committee that will research and evaluate full-time staff compensation.

d) Weekly Contribution. No longer is there any personal accountability on the weekly contribution.

e) Special Contribution/Missions Contribution. No longer will there be a compulsion in the giving of any money. Needs will clearly be laid out and your decision to give will be yours and yours alone.

3) Teaching. (2 Corinthians 13:5)

We have embarked on teaching the staff deep biblical teaching. Jeff Chacon, Jeff Wadstrom, Mark Hodge are coordinating this effort. They will work along side brothers like Keith Wright, Dr. John Oaks and others to guide the staff on different biblical issues. This teaching will also be taught to the church at various meetings and events. Other topics that are currently being discussed but not limited to are:

- a) Principles of Bible Study
- b) Church Governance
- c) Autonomy
- d) Induction, Deduction and Revelation
- e) Re-examining the "The One Church" Teaching
- f) Healthy Relationship Boundaries
- g) A Fresh Look at Discipling
- h) What is Biblical Success?
- i) The Role of the Gospel
- j) Reexamining the Study Series (An open dialogue)
- k) Women's Roles
- l) The Role of the Full-Time Minister
- m) Counseling: A Professional Perspective (Ramona Garnier)
- n) Church Finances
- o) Consensus Leadership

As your brother, I humbly ask for your forgiveness. I hope that you are encouraged by the repentance that you have already seen. Many more things will change. I will continue to write updates to keep you all informed about what is happening. Please send me your questions and I'll try to answer them to the best of my ability.

Lastly, we are having a congregational service at the San Diego Convention Center on Sunday, April 27th. It will be an incredible worship service that will provide inspiration and hope. More changes and announcements will be made at that time. I want to invite all members and former members of the San Diego Church to please come. Our goal this year is to glorify God and to please Him with our lives.

With much love and with great respect,
Your brother,
Guillermo Adame