

The Boston Church of Christ Apology – March 16, 2003

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. **1 John 1:7-10***

March 16, 2003

Brothers and Sisters in the Boston Church,

Let those of us on the overseeing team (Gordon Ferguson, Wyndham Shaw, Randy McKean and Dan Bathon) say at the outset that we deeply regret all failures of our leadership, and deeply appreciate all gestures of grace and forgiveness on your part. We also want to say that trying to communicate our feelings through a written document is very challenging, and we ask you to listen carefully for our hearts as you read. Around the globe those in our fellowship of churches are in a major time of transition, re-examining many practices, and many are coming to God in humility seeking renewal and change. We rejoice in all repentance, public and private, and want to stay in this mode ourselves, as God continues to show us our sins and weaknesses. Many letters, articles and apologies have been published recently, which have served to motivate and inspire us to keep taking our own repentance deeper. We have much agreement with what these other apologies state. Certainly we agree that the abuses are widespread and present to one degree or another in most churches. However, they are present to different degrees in various ministries in those churches, depending on the specific leaders. But we are all guilty to some extent, and the greater the influence of one's leadership, the greater the responsibility before God. This explains why this letter comes from the overseeing team.

Areas where we are convicted that we have shared in these sins include, but are not limited to, the following: harsh and/or arrogant leadership; authoritarian discipling relationships; sinful motivation through the use of statistics and insensitive accountability; fostering financial giving under a sense of compulsion; and the misuse and misapplication of Scripture. The remainder of this letter will provide further details of our sin and repentance in these and other areas, along with an update on what we have done to put past repentance into action with needed changes.

We realize that there are a number of people who have moved from Boston or who have left the Boston church over many years and it is our hope that this letter will be made available to them either through the Internet or in some other fashion. If you know some of these people, we would appreciate any efforts you can make to see that this letter is sent to them. Our desire is to extend this apology to them, with an invitation to initiate dialogue that would hopefully lead to reconciled relationships.

In September 2002 the leaders in the Boston Church who made up the overseeing team came before the entire congregation in Lowell, Massachusetts, to confess our sins, apologize, share our repentance and ask for your forgiveness. Included was confession about making some feel like second-class citizens, not valuing those who are older and more mature, motivating with a concern for numbers and performance, not listening enough, not including non-staff people in important decisions, and doing things to perpetuate a clergy/laity system. We want to say clearly that we are deeply sorry about the way our sins and failures may have affected you and your family, your schedule and most of all your faith.

We realize that the things that we said in that meeting were not made available on the Internet in as timely a fashion as they could have been, and we are sorry for that oversight. For some time now, notes of that meeting have been posted on the Boston church Web site, and they will remain there for several more weeks to allow anyone who has not read them to have that opportunity.

Since that meeting the leaders in Boston have initiated a series of changes that hopefully demonstrate our ongoing repentance. It now seems good to give the church an update on some of those things. We also want to share with you other areas that have since been identified where additional repentance and changes need to be made.

In the months after that September meeting, a series of town meetings were held where the floor was open for questions and concerns to be expressed. A great deal of input was received from you in those meetings, and we all became more deeply aware of the needs and concerns of the congregation. We invited, and continue to invite, anyone who feels hurt by individual leaders to come and share those hurts and sins with the leaders who caused the pain. We welcome the opportunity to hear the specifics about what you are feeling, and to resolve those things with you. We should also mention that although we believe that the town meetings provided a good starting place for getting feedback in a group, more recent meetings in various ministry settings in Boston, New England and Europe have continued this process through smaller groups.

After the input from the town meetings, changes were made to encourage the development of leadership teams in every region of the church, where paid staff and non-staff leaders would work in concert to provide direction. At this writing, significant progress has been made in that area, with most regions now having such teams in place or working toward that end.

Additionally, the decision has been made to broaden the base of leadership for the entire Boston church based on biblically identified roles. The group that we have known as the overseeing team recently met with the all of the elders and evangelists in the church and with other "leaders among the brothers" (Acts 15:22). This last group is composed of staff and non-staff people of influence within their regions. The goal of this group will be to help develop a collective leadership, which will represent a fresh biblical vision of how to provide leadership for the entire congregation. This group is working to

find the best way to insure inclusive and efficient leadership. This letter is from the overseeing team, but at the end of it you will find the names of those in this working group (as well as a statement of their support of the things written here).

At this time we would like to address several additional issues with the congregation.

1. Ongoing repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10-11). We need to clearly say that though we began a process of repentance and change at least as early as last September, we do not believe we have fully dealt with the things that need to be addressed. One of our fellow leaders in another church recently remarked that repentance is not a destination but a direction. We are repenting. No one is saying we have made it through. We do not say, "It is over." Repentance and restoration must be an ongoing process for all churches and all Christians, and we pray for the humility to keep seeing anything that is not in line with God's will. We invite your additional input to help us see areas where more repentance or change is needed.

2. Leadership example (1 Peter 5:1-3, 1 Timothy 4:12). We see in Scripture that one of the primary roles of a leader is to be an example. We wish to apologize for our failure to be consistent examples of sacrificial and servant leadership. We believe that in some cases wrong leadership styles may have contributed to people leaving the congregation and, where this has happened, we are deeply sorry. We would invite you to share with us specifically any ways that our leadership may have hurt you or ways in which you see that it did contribute to someone's decision to leave our fellowship. Those of us in the overseeing team wish to express our apology also to the staff for the way in which our actions or inaction have hurt them and we ask for their forgiveness. Another weakness in our example has been in calling others to seek help with their lives, while not always seeking enough input ourselves. We wish to pledge to let everyone see our progress (1 Timothy 4:15).

3. Financial accountability (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). We apologize for having a financial process that has not been more open to non-staff evaluation and review, and want to express our intention to make major changes in this area. One of the first changes we want to communicate is our decision, commended by the group referred to on page 3, to reconstitute the Board of Directors of the Boston Church of Christ, so that there will be more non-staff people serving on the board than staff members. The new board will represent a broad cross section of the congregation, and will have broader influence and review capability to deal with financial issues and questions than in the past, as they work with the elders of the congregation.

Additionally, we recognize that there needs to be a careful review of staff compensation. Some policy changes related to our expense reimbursement for ministry staff have already been approved, but we see this as only a beginning. The Boston Church has been following the salary model that is currently used in all U.S.-based churches in the International Churches of Christ, but it is evident to us that we must review the approach being taken. A resolution to form a task force consisting of one non-staff representative from each region was passed by the Boston church board Monday night. This task force

will represent a cross section of the church, and will work (with some staff consultation) on what is fair compensation for staff members. As a part of this examination of staff compensation, we see the need to carefully examine the role of ministry staff women who have significant responsibilities with their children and their homes. We need a model that recognizes and fairly compensates our women leaders for their work, while, in some cases, not expecting that they can or should maintain the same ministry responsibilities as their husbands. Overall, we recognize a need to have a salary structure that will be commended by the congregation.

Also in regard to finances we want to apologize to you for the fact that money was not always spent wisely. Once money is given, it is no longer yours, but neither is it ours -- it is God's. At times we took a more conservative approach than other churches, particularly with the salary model, increasing salaries less than what we could have according to rules in place at the time. However, there were times when other expenditures were in excess of what was appropriate and needed. At times, we allowed the financial culture of the late '90s to influence our decisions more than biblical principles, and for this we are very sorry. Going forward the church will always have non-staff people as a part of the process of determining what is best in the management of finances. To adapt 2 Corinthians 8:20-21: "We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer [your] liberal gift[s]. For we [will take] pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men."

4. Biblical roles (Ephesians 4:11-16). In our ongoing effort to review our work in a spirit of repentance and restoration, the decision has been made to no longer use the terms "region leader" or "region elder." Going forward we will have evangelists and elders who serve in regions, but may also serve in wider roles when the needs arise. Leadership in our regions will be provided by leadership teams composed of some combination of elders, evangelists, deacons, and teachers or other leaders who are commended by the disciples. We are also assessing the women's ministry role to make any needed changes. Much in-depth study is currently being done to Biblically define leadership roles.

5. The one body (Ephesians 4:1-7). Recent widely-circulated letters and articles from various disciples have addressed the need for our churches to correct either impressions given, or teaching done, on the Biblical concept of the one church. We are happy to join with other congregations in saying that we clearly believe there is one church (Ephesians 4:1-7, 1 Corinthians 12:13) and believe the Biblical truth about how one enters the church and is saved through faith, repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 9:23-25, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:1-4, Galatians 3:26-27). It would be arrogant of us to think that we can dogmatically define the membership of that church ("The Lord knows those who are his" -- 2 Timothy 2:19). That is something only God can do, and we repent of having arrogantly assumed his role in some of our statements, studies or inferences. God will make these determinations on an individual basis by the truth found in his Word (John 12:48). We intend for there to be more clear teaching on this in the future. We understand that from time to time we may need to

come back to the congregation to more correctly teach on other subjects where there has been inadequate or incorrect teaching.

6. Biblical study (2 Timothy 2:15). We recognize that we have not placed the priority on the careful study of the Bible that is needed. Our church schedules and our various efforts to grow the church have often reflected a humanistic attitude. We have not given a high priority to in-depth biblical teaching, which is so vital to our faith and to our ability to build the kind of church that God desires. For this we are sorry and pledge ourselves to make the necessary changes so that our ministry is based on this type of study of the Scriptures.

7. Brotherhood unity (1 Peter 2:17). We recognize that God's family includes disciples in other congregations throughout the world and that we are responsible for seeking unity with them. Recent events and the changing face of the church have certainly strained relationships both within congregations and between congregations. We are grateful for the unity that we have with our sister congregations throughout New England and Europe and will continue to work to keep those bonds strong. We want to pledge ourselves to work for unity not only in New England and Europe but throughout the world. This is clearly God's will (John 17) and it will take a collective effort to defeat the forces of darkness and to bring Jesus to those who are yet lost. The transition from a dictated unity to a true unity, a forged unity, will take great love and perseverance by all of God's children. We want to make clear our desire to "love the brotherhood of believers" (1 Peter 2:17).

8. Continued openness (Psalm 139:23-24). Finally, we want to once again say that on these or other matters we wish to receive ongoing input from you, the members of the congregation. Please understand that we are inviting you to continue speaking the truth in love to us. Primarily we would urge you to carefully study the Bible so that you might help us all find more Biblical solutions to the challenges we face. Serious prayer and Bible study are vital needs at this hour. We understand that we are all a work in progress, but we want to make that progress.

God has done great things among our fellowship of churches. In the last twenty-four years we have seen miracles in our own lives and miracles around the world. As God always does, he has put his treasure in jars of clay and used us in spite of our weaknesses. As people grateful for his love, grace, and forgiveness, we want to keep changing and keep growing. We want to get rid of anything that keeps us from valuing one another, trusting one another, and loving one another deeply. "In every way [we want to] make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (Titus 2:10), because we know God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

As leaders, we understand our responsibility not only to help the church make the changes that will best glorify God and advance the gospel, but we understand the need to continually examine our own lives and receive help from God and others to make the changes we personally need to make. As we strive to be examples in that area, we call

on each of you to do the same, so that with one heart and one mind we make Jesus known in our world and bring many more to the foot of the cross.

May his grace be with you all.

Gordon Ferguson, Wyndham Shaw, Randy McKean, Dan Bathon

We the brothers referred to on page 3 have worked with the overseeing team to give our advice and input concerning this letter. We wish to commend it to the church and wholeheartedly express our desire to be a part of the ongoing repentance and restoration described here.

Elders:

Jack Frederick
Tom Jones
Tracy Larr
Clarence Webster

Evangelists:

Phil Arsenault
Brad Bynum
David Cedano
Sal DiFusco
Rich Fisher
Frank Hines
Brian Homet
Kevin Miller
Hector Morales
Jim Lenahan
John McGuirk
Chip Mitchell
Robin Rodriguez
Brian Scanlon
Sajjan Sharma
Roy Stagg
Jim Valente
Mike VanAuken
Andy Yeatman

Teacher:

Kelly Petre

Other leaders:

Mark Buchholz
Ken Lowey
Dave Malutinok
David McAnulty
Ken Ostrowski