

Denver Church of Christ Letter March 14, 2003

A Letter from the elders and evangelists of the Denver Church of Christ

The Denver Church of Christ began in 1986 with 50 members. Since that time, God has allowed us to multiply into eight different congregations with a membership of more than 1500 disciples. By the grace of God and through the faith of our brothers and sisters, many have found the joy of a true relationship with God.

Throughout our brief history, we have experienced much leadership transition. These changes have provided both opportunity as well as challenge. Four years ago, John Lusk moved here from the Philippines to serve as our evangelist. Two and a half years ago, an eldership was established to oversee the work of the church. Greg Jackson, Chris Jacobs, and Chip Roberts are presently serving as our elders. These men, along with evangelists John Lusk, Wade Cook and Hans Rasmussen and deacon of administration John Chisholm, work together as the consensus leadership team, or core group, of the Denver church.

Like many men before us, we live in times that are turbulent and uncertain; times that test and refine our faith. We are striving to be men who are responsive to the many and varied needs of the members of our church and yet who are not hasty and miss the way.

In recent months and especially recent weeks, we have spent much time listening to many of you via face to face talks, phone conversations, letters, and in our recent “family meetings.” We greatly appreciate the way so many of you have spoken up, expressing your concerns, sharing your hurts and providing your ideas about how to help our church grow stronger. Your input has been extremely helpful. We look forward to hearing much more from you in the future.

At this time, we would like to apologize for the following areas of weakness and sin that have existed within the leadership of the Denver church. These transgressions have taken place at different times and in varying degrees throughout the history of our church. We know this list is not exhaustive and we are eager to hear about any other such sins that we should repent of and apologize for.

AUTHORITARIAN LEADERSHIP (Mark 10:42-44)

There is God given authority and yet it is clear that Jesus commands leaders not to “lord it over” those under their care. In the Denver church, advice was often viewed as command; questioning leaders was often viewed as rebellion; and harshness was too often tolerated. Authority was extended beyond Biblical parameters to every discipler. Many of you have felt shut down or trapped under such leadership. We are sorry for these abuses and the hurts they have caused, and are committed to correcting this abuse of leadership and upholding the true model of spiritual leadership.

EXCESSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY (Prov 27:23-24, Gal 5:1)

What began as an attempt to “know the condition of your flocks” has resulted in a statistical method of accountability that has robbed people of their joy, fostered impure motivations and become a burden to many. We are sincerely sorry for this. We are grateful for the hard work,

tireless effort and deep love that many of you have had for those “under your care.” As a leadership, we do want to “know the condition of the flock” but will change the present system so that it is not harmful to your faith.

COMPULSORY GIVING (2 Cor 9:7)

The Bible says, “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” There have been abuses of this Biblical principle whereby amounts to be given were at times dictated by leaders in both regular and special contributions and guilt was often placed upon you if you were unable to meet those expectations. This was shameful and inexcusable. We are so sorry for this abuse. We are extremely grateful for the generosity and sacrifice of so many over the years. We are committed to Biblical sacrifice, but will not tolerate these abuses in the future.

INACCURATE TEACHING OF THE ONE TRUE CHURCH (Eph 4:4-6)

At times, it has been taught that the International Church of Christ is the one and only true church. This is inaccurate and arrogant. We do need to hold to the Biblical standards of salvation, however exclusive they may be, but understand that anyone who does so is a member of God’s church. We also want to correct inappropriate use of related terms such as “fall away” and “kingdom.” It is possible for someone to leave our fellowship and not have fallen away from God. The kingdom is much broader than the ICOC. We are sorry for the arrogance, division and confusion that this has caused.

INEFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION (Eph 4:2, 15)

The more “truth is spoken in love” the more we will grow as a church. Over the years, many of you have spoken up on a variety of topics and have not been listened to. Some have been unfairly labeled as rebellious, critical or divisive; others have been ignored or publicly embarrassed for trying to speak up. This was prideful, disrespectful, and detrimental. We are truly sorry for this and the pain it has caused. We recognize our need for your input and perspective.

Additionally, we have failed in our efforts to communicate with you clearly the progress and plans of the leadership. An example of this failure is our recent effort to communicate the plans for the Centennial Building. We sincerely apologize for the disrespect this has communicated and the distrust it has caused.

As elders and evangelists, we not only regret how these issues have made you feel, but do not believe such wrongs are ever justified. We sincerely apologize and ask your forgiveness. We are committed to changing not only these items, but any that arise that threaten the unity, righteousness and trust within our church. We ask that you please help us communicate these apologies and our desire to change with any of our brothers and sisters who have left the church for these reasons.

Beyond these issues, there have been many more concerns expressed and ideas presented by many of you. We are striving to compile, digest, and respond to these items as quickly, as thoroughly and as responsibly as we can. We would like to share with you some of the plans of action we have made at this point.

With respect to our Board of Directors: We are very grateful for the voluntary service we have had from our Board over the past two years. As their term limits are ending, we would like the congregation to re-vote on whether there should be an election or a selection of Board members. We would also like to define more clearly to everyone the purpose and responsibilities of the Board.

With respect to our finances:

- a. There will be financial statements and summaries distributed on a quarterly basis.
- b. There will be quarterly meetings for anyone who is interested in knowing greater details or asking any questions about those statements.
- c. The elders will appoint a committee of members to evaluate the present salary model for all paid staff. The Board must then approve whatever salary model is adopted, as has been done in the past.
- d. There will be greater cuts in our present budget, including lay-offs of some paid staff members, in order to balance the budget within our weekly contribution.

With respect to our deacons: We will expand the present group of deacons by further appointments in order to meet more of the needs within the church.

With respect to our present ministries: Each of our present ministries will be evaluated by the elders to see how they can be more effectively led in order to meet the needs of the members in a greater way. Ministries to be evaluated include, but are not limited to, Kid's Kingdom, Pre-teens, Middle School, High School, Campus, Singles, Single Parents, Marrieds, Physically Challenged, Chemical Recovery, Spiritual Resource, Spanish Speaking Ministry, etc.

With respect to new ministries: We would like to start a ministry for the mentally and emotionally challenged.

With respect to our discipling relationships: There will no longer be a structure of "one on one" discipling relationships imposed on all of our members. The Bible Talk family will be the primary source of implementing all of the "one another" passages found in the Scriptures. It will be up to the Bible Talk leaders and every member of the Bible Talk to see that everyone is experiencing the benefits of such relationships. There will be no hierarchy of one discipler over another, but rather everyone taking responsibility for one another, especially within each Bible Talk. The Bible Talk leaders will continue to be trained and directed by their regional leadership. As for our present "prayer partner" relationships, they will only exist as those individuals and that Bible Talk see fit.

With respect to teaching and preaching:

- a. We will make greater effort to educate everyone in important Biblical themes such as the grace of God, the nature of God, unity, love, and many more.
- b. We will consider how we can more thoroughly deepen our staff's knowledge of the Scripture.
- c. We have asked our deacon of teaching, Glenn Giles, to coordinate an evaluation of our present personal bible study series, and together along with the elders and evangelists to develop a more biblically sound and spiritually helpful study series for the future.

With respect to future family meetings: Since December of last year, we have conducted seven family meetings. These have been an extremely helpful resource in figuring out how we can more effectively help meet everyone's needs. We are very committed to continuing these meetings. We would like to hold two meetings per quarter in each of the regions of the Denver church, of varying nature and size, until the end of the year. We will strive to provide adequate notice of the dates, times and locations of these meetings in the upcoming months. After this year, we will re-evaluate the schedule.

These are just some of the plans that are being made at this time. We expect this list to grow in the weeks and months that lie ahead.

As your leaders and your servants we are staggered by the daunting task that lies ahead; it is the task of building Jesus church in a manner that is truly pleasing to Him. We are humbled and very sorry for our shortcomings and sins in doing so up to this point. At the same time, we are committed to being the humble, faithful and spiritual men needed to accomplish this task in the future and need your help like never before. We dream of a church that is rooted in a great love for God; that is guided by a resolve to follow the Scriptures; that is strengthened by a genuine love for one another; that is involved in meeting the needs of those less fortunate in our world; and that is committed to spreading God's amazing grace throughout our communities and to the ends of the earth! To God be the glory as we stand arm in arm and heart to heart in this common cause.

In Christ,

Greg Jackson, Chris Jacobs, and Chip Roberts, elders
John Lusk, Wade Cook, Hans Rasmussen, evangelists