

## **Acknowledgment and Apology: Detroit Church of Christ Ministry Staff**

**Wednesday, March 05, 2003**

I Thess 1:2 "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by the hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." Just as the Apostle Paul poured out his affection to the church in Thessalonica, so now do we, the full-time paid ministry staff of this church pour out our affections for you, the members of the Detroit Church of Christ.

As we consider each of you and your faith in our beloved Father and his Son, your works of love and servitude, your enduring faith and hope in the Gospel of Jesus we are moved to tears. You have opened up your homes, your hearts and your very lives to us in countless ways. You have allowed us the privilege of sharing in your moments of victory and elation and you have not withheld yourselves from us in your moments of sadness and loss. You have cheered us on. You have served us. You have comforted us. You have mourned with us. You have laughed with us. You have played alongside us. You have sacrificed for us. You have inspired us to endure when we did not want to endure.

We are profoundly grateful for the love, the honor, the respect and the trust that this church has given to us and to our families. The privilege and honor that each of us feels to be servants of the Detroit Church as its paid ministry staff is beyond words. In the last three years, and especially the last fifteen months, we have become aware that God was showing us that major change was needed within our church and amongst our sister churches in the International Churches of Christ. Resignations within the leadership ranks of our fellowship, the subsequent enactment of a shift towards a consensus-centered leadership structure, a number of men who publicly called for deep reflection and repentance, and the many of conversations and correspondence with members within our church and from sister churches have all helped us to realize our own failings and sin as your leaders.

These events alongside our own prayer, reflection and conversations have driven each of us to a realization of our many, many shortcomings. For these things, we are deeply saddened and broken.

Many direct talks with you in the church have helped us even see more clearly the myriad of ways that we have hurt the church, how we were insensitive to the church, how we lost touch with many elements of the church, how we betrayed the trust of the church.

We are incredibly grateful for those of you who have brought these things before us. We want to publicly acknowledge and seek forgiveness for these many actions. We want to enumerate some of the areas in which we feel we have sinned against you, our brothers and sisters.

## I. Authoritarianism

God ordained authority and structure for his church (Eph 4:11). However, extra-biblical authority and un-Christ like leadership are clearly forbidden. Without a doubt, an authoritarian and controlling organization structure imbedded itself within the heart of our church and sister churches. The existence of this extensive and hurtful system that we subscribed to has been the root of many of our excesses and abuses.

- A. Humanistic Discipleship:** Our desire to foster close relationships and organizational efficiency gave way to a control mechanism that demanded submission. Rather than friendship and "love one another" relationships, our practice of discipleship was more akin to people needing approval and permission rather than true brotherly advice. This was further enforced by the ministers' lack of deep teaching about Jesus-like servitude and holiness. A paternalistic, demeaning and dictatorial system developed where manipulation and control was often the result. Many leaders even had their consciences seared whereby they repeated and magnified the system of control. Often harshness, short answers and bullying were practiced by many of us. This was wrong and sinful. Humility, mutual respect, honesty, trust and servitude should have been the goal. It wasn't and we are very sorry.
- B. Rigid Discipleship Structure:** Due to our authoritarian practice of discipleship, we developed a rigid organization structure that enforced control and stunted real spiritual growth. This system tended to treat one party as "lesser" or "less mature" than the "discipler". Maturity in the faith could not easily be recognized. An over dependence was fostered within one's own small group and in the "one-on-one" discipling relationship. This dissuaded people from reaching for deeper relationships outside the small group or Bible Talk. This isolation left many people with needs unmet and feeling alienated within the church.
- C. Pedestal Leadership:** As the staff exalted leadership accomplishments, an unhealthy focus on individuals grew. This led to selfish ambition rather than servant leaders. Arrogance, people pleasing and cowardice were the results and we led many to imitate us. Favoritism was a direct consequence of this as well.
- D. Uniformity, Conformity and Legalism:** Rather than focus people to Biblical principles, self-reflection and inspiration, our system of authoritarianism drove people towards humanistic guidelines of righteousness and holiness. Like the Pharisees, a "Law" had developed against which people were judged. In our paternalism, we did not treat others as adults and individuals. Like a nervous parent, we did not want people to fall by their own mistakes and rather than trust that sometimes failures are God's greatest lessons, we demanded conformity and uniformity. The church's singles ministry has felt a particular burden because of this.

**E. Compulsion of Tithes and Offerings:** The Bible clearly states that our offerings should be from the overflow of our hearts due to gratitude for God and the Cross. In our sin, we often made the church feel compelled and coerced to meet a required amount that nullified the heart of a "cheerful giver." Despite these excesses, we are grateful for the continuing sacrifice of the church and will quickly change the way we teach giving and practice collections. Along with the Board of Directors, we hope to move to a closer and open examination of church budgets, how they are made, and even salary models for the paid staff.

## II. Accountability Abuses (Performance Focus)

In our humanistic effort to grow God's church, we developed a system where numeric goals and accountability took on a life of its own. An unhealthy focus on quantitative results (attendance, commitments, baptisms, membership, etc.) grew to be an ever-hungry monster that needed to be fed. Joined with our authoritarian organization, we wrongly stressed external performance. Thoughtless accountability was exercised. Performance on campaigns, numeric goals, financial giving, volunteerism, Women's Days, church attendance, etc. became goals rather than loving God and his people. This burdened the church, especially the families. Meeting or not meeting these expectations led to a false judgment of spirituality. People were tempted into deceit and compromise -- even when studying the Bible with a non-believer. We made ourselves into performers and people-pleasers rather than lovers of God. Although we believe we as a church have moved far from this practice, we still desire to refine ourselves in a way in order to have the church still glorify God. Your input will greatly assist us.

## III. Arrogance

Rather than stay humble leaders, often we, the paid ministry staff have insulated ourselves and often were unapproachable and distant. For this we are profoundly sorrowful. Our personal interactions and bonds are some of the most precious gifts of God (I Cor 12). Alongside this, we have sometimes been over-protective of the church by not sharing bad news in a mistaken belief that we should bear the burden rather than share it with the church. This has prevented us from receiving real input and real lessons from being learned by the congregation.

Such a case developed in regards to the debt that the church incurred several years ago, which began while the Reeds were leading the church. Through a combination of an ineffective oversight and training system, inexperience by administration and ministry leadership, and miscommunication, the Detroit church incurred approximately \$250,000 in debt. We recognize that this severe mismanagement has been a trial to the church in the past years. The lack of an effective Board and oversight by paid staff at the time led to the church carrying on its activities at a spending rate which could not be supported by its contributions over a period of more than a year. We want to make clear, however, that this was a case of neglect and not of funds ever being misappropriated or stolen. The Reeds accept full responsibility for neglecting these administrative issues. Through the excellent supervision of our administrator, Sean Seay, and the 2001 and 2002 Detroit Board, the church has paid off the entire amount of this debt in 2.5 years. We are committed to transparency and seeking real input from those on the Board of Directors and by you, the church.

We do not believe that any exhaustive list can ever be compiled. However, in our humble reflection, we feel that these are the most prominent areas that we must address right away. If we have omitted an issue that you feel is relevant; we would like to hear from you. Indeed, we have met with many of you to confess, repent, and seek solutions for these failings. We have felt much love, comfort, graciousness and forgiveness already in our goal to move beyond the past. Thank you.

As your brothers and sisters, we gave way to fear and cowardice and did not question a "system" that had grown up around us. Whatever the scenario, there can be no excuse, however. Through God and your support, we desire to never be like that again.

We invite those of you that have felt that you were a part of this "system" to also reflect and re-examine where you may have hurt others. We believe it will help you greatly as we have felt refreshing in our repentance. We desire to have a continuing dialogue on ways to repent to each of you individually as cases may warrant.

Some of you have expressed that not all these issues have been relevant here in the Detroit church, or at least for some time. We agree that God has insulated our church from some of the larger excesses being reported elsewhere. For that, we are grateful. We believe our first steps towards change began several years ago with the help of many of you. More recent members have expressed in conversations that they have not witnessed these issues. Nonetheless, we want you to be aware of the areas where we see the need to change and ask for your help in resolving and restoring the love and unity in our spiritual family, the church.

We have chosen to list these before you and God as a public repudiation of these sinful practices, as only the beginning of our repentance, and as a humble appeal for your forgiveness and trust.

In 1989, this church was a dream fulfilled for pioneering disciples from Atlanta, Chicago, Lansing, Kansas City and other cities. Individuals and families moved to Detroit filled with idealism, hope and faith to build a church filled with Christians committed to being Disciples of Jesus Christ.

We can imagine that, like ourselves, your hearts were filled with these fruits of the spirit when you became Christians, as well. Through deep forgiveness and repentance, may God shine his Grace upon all of us. Let future members of the Detroit Church of Christ look back and say that the church was a dream fulfilled for its pioneering disciples in 2003.

Sincerely,

Larry & Kim Reed, Jeff & Lauren Kazee, Brian & Shann Perkins, Rodney & Patricia Hendricks, Roy & Lisa Chow