

Letter to the Hong Kong Church of Christ on April 7 , 2003

"From: The lead evangelist, regional leaders, shepherding evangelist, and women's ministry leaders

Peace to each one of you! May God bring good health to you and your family! We know that war in the Middle East and the recent outbreak of atypical pneumonia in Hong Kong has been on each of your hearts. At the same time, different churches amongst the various world sectors have been reflecting on their past church life and evangelism, and have made some changes. These changes have stimulated the leaders of the Hong Kong Church of Christ to much thought and introspection, as we consider what we may need to change in our leadership and shepherding of our brothers and sisters over all these years.

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After much thoughtful consideration, we want to express to our brothers and sisters our standpoint and reflections in the following areas:

1. Exercise calmness when reading different letters and news

1 Corinthians 14:33 "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace."

Because the leaders of the International Churches of Christ are working hard to give over power and authority to each local church, some changes in the leadership are almost unavoidable. Due to the differences in culture and historical background, opinions and requests may differ from place to place. We want to ask each of you to apply or consider your own personal experience in Hong Kong when reading different letters and news from abroad. Calmly let God lead his Church as we serve all nations.

2. Reflections on discipling relationships

Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

In the culture of our church, "one on one" discipling has created an "over and under" hierarchy. Advice and opinion have too often become commanded to be followed, creating a feeling of being controlled and oppressed. At the same time a lot of the opinions and feelings of more mature disciples were being neglected and they felt discouraged. This shouldn't happen. We still believe that discipling relationships are Biblical and should be an important part of our spiritual life. But these relationships should not be authoritarian. In the future we will seek to develop deep discipling relationships, put into practice the "one another" teachings, build godly family values, and care for one another.

3. The use of statistics

Ephesians 2:8-10 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Statistics are a tool that should only be used to understand the needs of the church, so that the leaders can shepherd the church in a better way. They should not be used to judge our failure or success. Regrettably, we have not always used statistics wisely in the past, causing feelings of guilt or failure, and there are brothers and sisters who have felt unaccepted and unloved. We are sincerely sorry, and in the future, we will seek much more and broader advice so that statistics can be used effectively.

4. Communication with the congregation

John 10:14-16 “I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”

The church membership is growing, and we have realized that we have not built an effective feedback system, nor listened to the general voices about our leadership. The old leadership culture, the “discipler – disciple” relationship concept, and our strong, opinionated natures have made it difficult for opinions to be passed on or to be accepted, and this shouldn’t be. We have not actively sought input from the congregation (especially mature disciples’ input), and have stopped short of having a healthy two way communication in the running of the church; we are therefore implementing changes immediately. In order to change the current situation, we are inviting mature non-staff disciples in each sector to act in the roles as advisors and monitors in the administrative, financial and evangelistic operations of their respective sectors. The church website has already setup a shepherding response section. We are also looking to appoint deacons in the not too distant future in different areas to serve God. After receiving input from the congregation, we will quickly move to implement the details of these plans.

5. Upholding the Great Commission

Matthew 22:37-40 “Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

For many years, we have been emphasizing the Great Commission [Matthew 28] in our teaching, and because of that many feel that their ‘fruitfulness’ has become the only indicator of spirituality. We believe that the Great Command taught by Jesus [Matthew 22] should also be upheld. We deeply feel the thirst of many disciples for the Bible. This year our theme is “Thirsting for God”. In the future, the church will continue to emphasize the need to study and teach the Bible. “Project Oasis” has already started, and the “Bible Teaching Week” will be in June. Our prayer is that each of us will be spiritually nourished and fed.

6. The teaching about “Church” study

Ephesians 4:4-6 “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

We have found that the way we teach the “Church” study has created an exclusive and arrogant attitude that we are “the only church”. Today, we hope this attitude can be changed. We still hold to the Bible teaching about salvation: [Acts 2:38; Roman 6:3-10], faith in Jesus, confession, repentance and baptism for salvation. This is the clear teaching of salvation in the Bible.

This is where we stand. We love this family deeply. We appreciate the input of different brothers and sisters. We are convinced there are many areas that we need to change and improve in our leadership. We have no doubt that the whole staff of the Church is committed to be “after God’s own heart”. We are not perfect, but we are willing to be completely humble before God and before the whole congregation as we pursue holiness and righteousness. We need your grace and support.

The Holy Spirit is blowing the wind of change; we believe that everything is in God’s control. Please pray for our unity, as we also pray for the suffering in Hong Kong and around the world.

May God’s Word spread quickly, and may the grace of Jesus and the love of God be with you. Amen!"