

March 2003 By Houston International Church of Christ

An Announcement from the Staff and Deacons of the Houston International Church of Christ

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5: 1)

Significant events in recent months have caused us to seriously examine our obedience to God’s will according to the scriptures, both here in Houston and in the churches of our fellowship around the world. Some of these events include:

- The situation that occurred in Dallas and resulting changes in leadership throughout the former Great South Sector over the last few years
- Gordon Ferguson’s recent book Golden Rule Leadership
- Kip McKean’s resignation as World Missions Evangelist
- The prayers and perseverance of many Christians seeking change
- The dissolution of the World Sector Leadership group
- The recent letter written by evangelist Henry Kriete
- The cries of many, both in and outside the church, who’ve been hurt
- The meeting of our church deacons and staff this past Sunday, to identify and begin plans to correct our past wrongs and align our course more closely with God’s teachings

At a meeting on Sunday, February 22, 2003, many sins and areas of concern were identified and discussed. Among the key areas that we believe need to be explored and changed are:

- Issues of financial giving such as coercion in giving, improper mandate of the Special Contribution, and feelings of failure caused by humanistic goals and expectations.
- Abusive leadership and discipleship practices such as impure motivation caused by an undue emphasis on image and statistics, giving “permission” instead of advice, and a lack of approachability and humility on the part of some members of our leadership and staff.
- Doctrinal issues such as the content of and reliance on the First Principles studies, the binding man-made rules and traditions on our members without Biblical authority, and improper and arrogant teaching regarding the nature of the one true church and the role of elders and evangelists in it.
- Practices that create a feeling of fear, distrust, and failure such as a lack of mutual trust and honesty between leaders and other members, not valuing and respecting the unique gifts and talents of *all* of the members of the church, and many believers’ feelings of not being heard, valued, or of being labeled as “critical” for speaking-up.

These sins and concerns are just a few of the major issues raised, as well as many others that the church intends to deal with urgently. We want to hear your concerns as well, and will be providing an opportunity for you to express your feelings openly in the coming days.

As for the sins already mentioned, we are committed to earnest, whole-hearted repentance and a renewed dedication to following God's Word alone. Many have left our fellowship feeling hurt or betrayed; others have stayed but felt defeated. For this we are truly sorry. We beg both God and those who have been hurt or affected by these sins for forgiveness. We encourage you to search your own hearts and to be open about any hurts or fears you have experienced, as well as taking responsibility for ways in which you may have hurt others and offended God.

We are calling a congregational meeting on the afternoon of **Sunday, March 9th**, during which you will be given an opportunity to discuss these issues or anything else that you wish to discuss with the church staff and fellow members. So that all of our members may participate there will be only limited childcare available; we encourage you to try and make arrangements in advance for your children. Until that meeting takes place, we encourage you to talk about any feelings or questions you may have with anyone in the church who you feel strongly bonded with. If you are helping someone through these issues, we encourage you to be quick to listen and slow to speak. We want this to be a time for healing and revival, not for condemnation or defensiveness.

As we embrace God's discipline, we ask each of you to fast and to pray for wisdom, the Houston church, the unity of our fellowship around the world, and for God's forgiveness. Amen.