

An Apology from the Metro Manila Christian Church Staff

Sunday, March 30, 2003

*"Unless the LORD builds the house,
its builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
The watchmen stand guard in vain."*

Psalm 127:1-2

Since 1989, God has showered His church in the Philippines with countless miracles and spiritual blessings for which we will be eternally grateful. By the power of God, the seed of 28 disciples who helped plant the church has now become thousands of faithful disciples in 16 churches in Manila and throughout the Philippines. During the past few months different unspiritual practices and attitudes that have pervaded our movement over the years have been uncovered. Different talks, letters, discussions, "family talks," and most of all what we believe to be God's Spirit of conviction have caused the staff of the MMCC, to re-examine its leadership of God's people. Over the past four weeks, we have shed many tears and have cried out in prayer as we have spent time listening to people. We see the depth of pain we have caused God and His people. We desire to hear so much more from you, in order to solidify and deepen our brokenness and convictions.

We are sorry for the sins we have committed against God, against many of you, and as well against many who have left the church. We are convicted to see a root sin and various other faults at different times in the history of the churches of the Philippines.

Root Sin of the Leadership: Forsaking Our First Love

Revelations 2: 4-5

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place."

Over the years, we have fallen short of allowing the Bible to properly define the church's mission (to win the world for Christ) apart from the church's purpose (to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength). This failure prompted our hearts to drift from focusing on loving God as our highest priority. As a general result, loving God had not become our top priority. For many leaders, growing the church at any cost or looking good in the eyes of people became more the priority. Many, instead of getting their confidence and joy from their walk with God, sought them through man-made goals. From this root sin, other sins have resulted.

Selfish Ambition

Psalm 115:1

"Not to us, O Lord, not to us
but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness"

Many full-time staff lost the heart of purely serving God and started doing things for their own glory. This resulted in people-pleasing, baptizing people who were not ready, and tolerating sin for the sake of looking good in the eyes of men.

Some of you have expressed hurts in these areas:

- Accountability had become a burdensome 'stats' system, focused too much on growth
- Campaigns for big attendances without popular consensus or pure motivation were pushed by staff.
- Fruitfulness and personal success equated with numerical growth was the norm.
- A toleration a shallow love for the poor was practiced.

Authoritarian Leadership

Mark 10:42-43

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you..."

Many disciples experienced being "lorded over" by leaders. Several leaders have been arrogant and unapproachable. Some important decisions were made without much consultation from the membership. In many sectors, advice became commanding and questioning leaders resulted in being branded as critical or rebellious. Authority was given to disciples more than the Bible recommends. Some of you were also shut down, especially those who spoke up about certain needs. Some disciples were not allowed to move house or work for reasons that would hurt the numeric status of the ministry.

Shamefully, even our giving and contribution became generally mandatory. We wish to go back to motivation by grace, servant leadership, and biblical sacrifice.

Negligence

Ezekiel 34:4

"You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost."

In an effort to keep moving forward, many important needs in the church were overlooked. After several "family talks", we have realized even more and are truly sorry for these needs that have been neglected. Disciples have expressed the need for direction for a deeper, individual walk with God. Those who have been with our fellowship longer have particularly voiced a desire for more substantial feeding in their spiritual growth. However, we have been slow to build a solid teaching ministry with elders and teachers. We apologize to those who have gone hungry for spiritual knowledge and for having presented the concepts of "falling away" and the one true church" in the wrong manner. Additionally, the Filipino-American ministers want to apologize especially for neglecting to learn Filipino, as many have expressed the need to hear preaching in Filipino.

Those who were mourning death or who were sick needed more comfort and compassion, while others desired attention for their special needs. The provincial churches have wanted encouragement and training but have not received enough. Some who have formerly served in the full time ministry were mistreated, and their service to God and their friendship have remained largely unappreciated.

We are also sorry for not explaining and clarifying the reasons for discontinuing the use of the MMCC building in San Juan which caused many to doubt the financial integrity of the full time leadership. We plan to present a detailed and formal explanation soon from our financial committee.

Favoritism

1 Timothy 5:21

"I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism."

It was becoming obvious that members of the church were not being treated equally. This was especially seen as certain "sharper" ministries and schools were highlighted more than others. Some disciples who were "not close to the leaders" were treated with less attention. In many sectors, a double standard arose in the areas of counting people as fallen away and considering move-ins from other ministries. Further, in the last couple of years, the missions' contribution was used more for Metro Manila than for the provinces and church plantings. We feel terrible that so many of you expected church plantings that did not happen.

We are deeply sorry for having let our hearts go astray and we ask for your forgiveness. We regret that many of you have tried to speak up and share your hearts to us, but we have shut some down, and it has taken so long for us to listen. We see the painful consequences of our lack of listening. We are committed to continuing an open dialogue and look forward to receiving more input on how to help our church to be more pleasing to God.

A Deeper Look

In our efforts to heal the church and revive the hearts, we are asking as many people as possible to be involved. Please approach the staff for any feelings and suggestions you wish to express. The channels are open. You are all encouraged to join different family talks and dialogues to bridge the gap between the staff and the rest of the church.

There will also be 11 different committees formed consisting of both church staff and non-staff members to be able to gather input in various areas of the church, including shepherding, the women's role, children's ministry, and provincial churches and future missions.

We would like to come up with specific plans and direction for the church as soon as possible. But, as part of our repentance, we wish to involve as many members to be part of the decision-making process of these committees. Given that we need your consultation in these matters, we do not want to be hasty in reaching these decisions. It is our hope that within the next few weeks that through the formation of these

committees we will be able to thoroughly address the following issues. Rest assured that we are committed to keeping you involved and informed of crucial decisions, plans, and actions.

Regarding our governance, we are forming a committee to re-define the Church board's functions and responsibilities. We are committed to showing greater representation of the people in our leadership.

Regarding our finances, there will be greater transparency in leadership decisions and finances, including staff spending. Also, we are extending an open invitation for more members to be involved and give suggestions to the financial committee. We are in the process of making major changes in the area of financial accountability.

Regarding doctrine, we will be forming a teaching committee to correct mishandled issues and prepare teaching plans for the churches. Please expect positive changes and deeper teaching in the areas of discipling, giving, worship, dating, and leadership. Regarding HOPE worldwide, our outreach will emphasize godly concern, genuine involvement and hands-on experience.

God has been pruning our hearts for a long time, and we wish to respond radically. Again we are sorry for the hurt we have caused. We pray to be humble, faithful, and reliable as we build the church of Christ the way He wants. We are confident that if we truly repent and sincerely strive to walk more closely according to God's Word, God will heal and bless His church once more. We desire to build God's church where every disciple is fulfilling the dream for the life that God wants him or her to have in Christ. May God's grace see us through these trying times, as we resolve to make Christ known in our nation.

In Christ,
The MMCC Full-time Staff