

## **Letter from the Elders, Evangelists, and Ministry Staff of the New York City Church of Christ**

Throughout this year, God has been moving in our church in an unprecedented way. The Spirit has taught, tested, rebuked, and refined us like never before. As a result, it is clear to us that God has been exposing our sins so that our congregation might become more mature in Christ. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

We believe that God will bless our repentance and faith and that he will accomplish great things in the New York City Church of Christ in the future. Already, God's hand is blessing us as a congregation. Three new elders were appointed in September bringing the total to five, and many deacons have been raised up to serve throughout the regions.

As leaders and your brothers in Christ, we want to share with you what God has placed on our hearts regarding what we have learned from this year and where we believe God is taking us. We pray that you will be greatly encouraged by this letter. Please pray for us to have the humility, courage, wisdom, and conviction to serve and lead in a way pleasing to God.

### **I. Acknowledgements And Confessions**

The ministry staff of the New York City Church of Christ would like to offer in writing an apology for the sins and shortcomings, which we have committed over the years. We know that many of you have suffered much pain and hurt because of our mistakes. We are sorry that this apology letter has been slow in coming. Several attempts were made to write this letter. Numerous drafts were written, but never completed. In April one of our elders became seriously ill and was hospitalized. As a result the eldership was unable to complete the letter at that time. In addition, our ministry staff has been in a constant state of flux because of numerous resignations. We began the year with 105 people on the ministry staff; we now have 41.

Earlier in the year local leaders made apologies for sins committed in their respective ministries. The elders visited numerous sectors listening to concerns and apologizing for mistakes made and regret not being able to go to every sector. Each sector has its own personality, and mistakes that were common in one sector of the church might not be as prominent in another. Undoubtedly, some mistakes occurred that are not even mentioned in this letter. However, we would like to acknowledge and confess the sins that we believe have been most prevalent in the leadership of the New York City Church over the years.

Listed below are the sins and shortcomings that we have seen:

### Pride and arrogance

- Failure to acknowledge the biblical role of elders
- Overemphasis on numerical growth
- Selective listening that led to leadership groups that were out of touch with the membership
- Harshness in leadership
- Elevation of leadership to the status of "Expert" in all matters of life
- Unfair judgments and "Labeling" of individuals
- Self-righteousness that led to a false understanding of the one true church
- Lack of respect for older, mature members
- Harshness in discipling relationships, which led to advice being treated as Law
- Making decisions for local ministries without seeking input from local leadership and membership

### Irresponsibility and lack of wisdom

- Inadequate spiritual training and teaching of the ministry staff
- Too much leadership responsibility given to young, inexperienced staff members
- Failure to equip the church which led to spiritual immaturity
- Ineffective communication of the financial details of the church such as the salary model, cost of facilities, administrative costs and other expenses.
- Failure to seek input from spiritual men who are not on staff in decision making

### Worldliness

- Leadership selection was sometimes based on worldly abilities instead of spirituality and heart
- Favoritism in the selection and treatment of the some staff members and their families as well as other leadership
- Unscriptural expectations of women's leadership
- Lack of proper emphasis on the women's role
- The use of unhealthy pressure to accomplish ministry and financial goals
- Cowardice and people pleasing; a reservation to speak the truth in love to those over us in leadership
- Again, we are deeply sorry for these sins and the damage they have caused. We ask that you pray for us to grow in humility and wisdom. As a family we are committed to repentance, forgiveness, conflict resolution (Mt. 18:15) and making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

## **II. What We Believe**

In the first century, Satan made attempts on many levels to destroy the unity of the church. He used false teachers to confuse the church in the area of doctrine. The circumcision group taught that Gentiles needed to follow Jewish laws to be disciples. James, Paul, Peter, and other disciples met in Jerusalem to discuss these issues. This

council decided certain principles that the church needed to follow to be united (Acts 15).

For the sake of unity, the elders and evangelists have discussed areas of doctrine that are central to the teaching of the Bible. This is not a church creed. The Bible is our creed. These are simply central tenets of the Christian faith on which we must all be unified.

We believe in

God as loving Father (1 John 3:1, Rom. 8:15),

Jesus as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36),

The Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and is our Helper (Rom. 8).

We believe the Bible is God's Word and the authoritative voice in matters of life and doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

We believe that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second is like it--to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:28-31, 1 John 4:19-21).

We believe each disciple must practice the "one another" scriptures as taught throughout the New Testament (John 13:34-35, Rom. 12:10, Gal. 6:2).

We believe that salvation is offered to us solely by God's grace (Eph. 2:8). We accept the saving grace of God through faith, surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus, repentance, and baptism (Acts 2:38).

We believe that God's church is made up of baptized believers who follow the Lordship of Jesus and the doctrine of the Bible (Eph. 4:4-6).

We believe that we must make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

We believe that local congregations are directed by shepherds/elders who meet the spiritual qualifications as listed in the Bible. Evangelists provide leadership and help build the local congregations. Deacons are selected by the elders and evangelists to serve the congregation (1 Tim. 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, Eph. 4:11-13, Acts 14:23).

We believe in the great commission--Jesus commanded us to "go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20).

We believe that we should help those less fortunate than we are. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Gal. 6:10).

We believe that Jesus will come again in his glory to receive the saved into an eternal home in heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-18, Mt. 25:31-46).

### **III. Where God is Leading Us**

In the Old Testament God provided the Hebrew people a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to lead them through the wilderness into the Promised Land. We have been in the wilderness, but we believe that God is leading us out of it. He wants the church to be radiant. He doesn't provide us with a pillar of fire. But he allows us to learn from our mistakes, get input on the changes we need to make, and then make solid decisions about our future.

#### **Spiritual Changes:**

The overall spiritual health of the church is our utmost priority. We want to have a greater emphasis on deepening our personal relationships with God, strengthening our "one another" relationships with each other and growing in the fruit of the Spirit.

- · We are placing a greater emphasis on the cross and the grace of God as the motivation for the Christian life.
- · We are focusing on the greatest commandment "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."
- · We are living by the new commandment--to love others as Jesus has loved us.
- · We are soliciting and taking input from the congregation.
- · We are placing a greater focus on providing leadership that is both spiritual and mature.
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By growing in God's grace and the fruit of the Spirit, we believe that the church will be a shining light as God intended, and we will fulfill Jesus' Great Commission.

#### **Structural Changes:**

We are striving to follow the Biblical pattern of leadership for the church. Jesus, as our Lord and Savior, is the head of the church. The elders and evangelists work together "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Eph. 4:11-13)." We currently have five elders: Dale Porter, Sam Powell, Paul Ramsey, Roy Taliaferro, and Bob Oberle. They are overseeing all aspects of the New York City church including the office administration, finances, and the church ministry staff. There is no outside group or person directing the affairs of the church. Please pray for these elders to be wise and humble as they shepherd the church. Sectors within the church

are led by evangelists. These evangelists are seeking the input of spiritual individuals from their ministries. Deacons have been selected and are being selected throughout the sectors to serve the needs of the church.

Our prayer is that God will continue to raise up more elders, evangelists, and deacons to meet the needs of His church.

Financial Changes:

What has changed financially:

The New York City Church is financially independent of the ICOC, ACES World Sector or any other congregation or association of churches.

The weekly contribution of the NYCCOC averaged \$186,000 in January of 2003. The contribution has declined to an average of \$90,000 per week in August of 2003.

We have formed a compensation committee consisting of human resource and business professionals who are non-staff members of the NYCCOC. They are in the process of evaluating the current salary model and a newly proposed model. Once they complete their evaluation, they will solicit input from the congregation through representatives from each region and then make a recommendation to the elders for a new compensation plan.

We have suspended contributions to the retirement plan for our staff pending review of the salary model and improvement in our financial situation.

The ICOC group liability insurance has been terminated effective September 30. The NYCCOC has obtained comparable liability insurance at reduced rates.

The ICOC group medical insurance has been discontinued effective October 31. We are pursuing less expensive medical insurance through a local broker.

In order to cut administrative overhead, we have vacated our office facility in Rockland County. The administrative staff has been reduced from 15 to 10. Seven of these began working out their home effective October 1. We have rented a small office in NJ where we will maintain a staff of three people for essential administrative functions.

We are now tracking revenue and expenses by each region that meets separately. This information has been made available to the membership.

Although we continue to support HOPE Tri-State through our contribution for the poor, we have suspended contributions to HOPE Worldwide as of September 1 pending further discussion.

We are committed to balancing the budget of the NYCCOC and helping each region to live within its means.

Topics currently under study and discussion:

- The New York City Church's relationship to other churches in the International Churches of Christ and to churches in the restoration tradition
- Use of the "one another" scriptures to help disciples reach maturity
- The most effective way to train the ministry staff in areas of Biblical studies, church growth, and counseling
- Reviewing the series of studies that are used in helping people to become disciples of Jesus
- Researching the benefits of our local ministries becoming autonomous churches
- We believe that women can serve in the full-time ministry. We want to take more time to study, pray, and consult with women about the role of women in the fulltime ministry.
- How to fund existing and future mission work
- Eliminating the Clergy/Laity mentality

Conclusion:

As disciples of Jesus, we are committed to continue to repent as we see our sins, to strengthen our weaknesses, and to build God's Kingdom under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We have been blessed to witness amazing miracles that God has accomplished in our generation and have also been disciplined by our Father in heaven. We praise God and thank him for both the miracles and the discipline. By faith, we will not lose heart, but we will continue to grow striving toward maturity in Christ. As servants of Christ who will be judged more strictly, we ask for your prayers and help. God has certainly not finished his great work, and the world is yet to be won for Jesus.

Elders:

Bob Oberle  
Dale Porter  
Sam Powell  
Paul Ramsey  
Roy Taliaferro

Ministry Staff:

|                  |                        |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Robert Brace     | William Jason McGainey |
| Jim Brown        | Marcos Mercado         |
| Robert Carrillo  | James Rempel           |
| Tito Collazo     | Johnny Rivera          |
| Scott Davis      | Ronald Rose            |
| Stanley Dumornay | John Spiciarich        |
| Matthew Dye      | Marc Thompson          |
| Shane Engel      | William Torruella      |
| Robert Jones     | Sheridan Wright        |
| Steve Kinnard    | Norman Vosschulte      |