

## **"A Letter from the Elders and Evangelist of The Nashville Church- March 19, 2003**

One year ago, the leadership of The Nashville Church read "The Golden Rule of Leadership" by Gordon Ferguson and Wyndham Shaw. Subsequent to that, the leadership held meetings that began to make changes in the leadership approach of the church. Our evangelist, Doug Lambert, began at that time making specific apologies to the elders concerning his one-man approach to the leadership of the church. Doug sincerely apologized for harshness and arrogance toward the elders, the staff, and others, both privately and publicly. At that time, the evangelist and the elders began making a concerted effort to work together regarding the leadership in the church.

In January 2003, we talked about changing our Special Missions Contribution so that we would not give a "multiple" amount goal to each disciple, but, rather, simply have a church goal. Also, we came to the conviction that we not use accountability or any type of pressure to make our goal, but, rather, only what God puts on the members' hearts. (2 Corinthians 9:7-"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.") This decision was announced at an all-church service, February 16.

Also, from deep conviction, on the same day, we announced in an all-church Bible Talk (now called Family Group) Leaders' meeting to do away with all "stat" and "numbers-type" reporting for Bible Talk Leaders, Zone Leaders and Sector Leaders.

Another conviction the evangelist and elders developed in late 2002 and early 2003 was that the decision-making of The Nashville Church would be made in Nashville by the local church leadership and not by another church or "discipler" in another city.

God was definitely preparing our hearts to receive what was about to come. By mid-February letters were being written and distributed by church leaders from around the world that profoundly affected our thinking and deepened our convictions on things that needed to be changed. We made some of these letters available to all of our members on a local website. We then began meeting with many of you to hear your feelings, hurts and desires for the church. We heard much pain and saw many tears, and we deeply regret the hurts that we and other leaders have caused or allowed to happen. Words cannot express how sorry we are and how much we want to change everything that has been ungodly or humanistic about our leadership and character.

After much listening, Bible Study, soul searching and prayer, the following is a list of the areas we have seen that need to change and changes we immediately want to make. We will continue to study out other changes that we will need to make in the near future.

### **Authoritarian Leadership**

The authoritarian style of leadership that has existed in our local congregation and in our hierarchical structure of churches has been ungodly, and it has been hurtful to many of you. There is God-given authority in the Bible, and, yet, it is clear that Jesus commands leaders not to "lord it over" those under their care. Many of you have been hurt or felt shut down or trapped by this type of leadership.

There will no longer be an unbiblical structure of "one over one" discipling relationships, and there will no longer be a structure of discipling relationships imposed on all our members. The primary way we will fulfill the "one another" passages in the Bible will be through Family Groups and House Churches. It will be up to the Family Group leader and the members of the Family Group to see that each member is receiving the benefit of such godly relationships. Church leadership will do more to teach the church and the Family Group leaders on the "one another" passages and to give ideas for implementing those in a beneficial way.

Also, because of the one-man authoritarian type of leadership that has existed, the role of elders has not been respected to the proper degree, which has hurt the church. As a result, the church has not been protected because the elders have not been empowered to fulfill their God-given role. The scriptures direct the elders to oversee the affairs of the church and to be the decision-makers for the congregation. Doug Lambert, evangelist, has placed himself under the direction and leadership of Barry Holt and Woody Rowe and any future elders that the church may have.

We regret the decision to take Barry and Debbie Holt off fulltime staff in 2002. This was a mistake. We have asked them to consider returning to fulltime work in their roles as elder and elder's wife with the church.

Also, we are working at this time to choose deacons, who will serve, along with the elders and evangelist, in the leadership of the church. We will be teaching about biblical roles and appointing deacons in the weeks to come.

#### False Teachings/Practices

We deeply regret the arrogance of statements that have been made publicly and privately stating or implying that there are no saved people outside of the ICOC fellowship. This statement is arrogant, and it is scripturally impossible to justify. We believe that the Bible is very clear about how one becomes a Christian—he must make a decision to make Jesus Lord of his life, truly repent of his sins, and be immersed in baptism for the forgiveness of sins. The Bible teaches that when a person does this, God adds them to his church.

We are at this time asking Steve Brown and Phil Murray, who both have advanced Bible degrees, to re-evaluate our study series to make the series reflect these biblical convictions. During the next few midweeks we will be specifically studying together a number of topics including salvation, church leadership, role of women, and others.

We also want to apologize for using the term "fallaway" to reflect all members who have left the church and for automatically considering them as having left God. We realize that deciding to leave The Nashville Church is not necessarily making a decision to leave God, and we are very sorry for the hurt that has resulted from this teaching.

Forced tithing and coercive giving are also practices that are unscriptural. The Scriptures are clear in the verse we used above that giving is to come from the heart. There will be no more accountability or multiples used for Special Missions Contributions. We deeply regret the hurt these practices have caused many of you and wish to assure you that these practices will not be tolerated in the future. We are committed to world evangelism and to our brothers and sisters in the mission field in Latin America and all over the world. We seek to work with other churches of like mind and heart to continue to fulfill our Lord's Great Commission.

"Rules taught by men" and "advice" that are enforced as command and given the same weight as scripture will no longer be practiced or tolerated. This is not limited to but does include "dating rules." The scriptures are clear about seeking advice, making spiritual decisions, impurity, sexual immorality and not being yoked with unbelievers. We will give spiritual counsel to our brothers and sisters, but advice will be advice only.

We are deeply sorry for the pain we have caused by the use of ungodly motivations such as the use of statistics, number goals, guilt or coercion. God never intended us to live as Christians in a state of guilt. Instead, we wish to do much teaching and preaching on the godly motivations of the Bible: the cross of Christ, God's grace and mercy toward us as sinners, gratitude for what God has done in our lives, his love and forgiveness. We are very sorry for using humanistic methods in attempting to grow the church.

We have also had a worldly paradigm for world-wide organization that has reflected more of a "corporate structure" than a biblical one. There will be no more hierarchical control coming from another church toward us or from us toward another church. We do deeply desire to be unified with other churches of like mind and heart, but we wish it to be a true unity and not a forced one. Because of the corporate structure we have had, there have been burdens placed on our church, financial and otherwise, which have weakened it. As well, we have weakened other smaller churches by asking members to move from those smaller churches to Nashville, and, in doing so, we have caused harm to the smaller churches. We have apologized to those churches that we know we have hurt in this way. For this we are truly sorry.

We have also come to realize that we have created a "clergy/laity" system that has to be completely torn down. This cannot be "the leaders' church." This must be "every member's church." Leaders in the Bible, while clearly speaking God's truth, are to also be servants and friends. Leaders are not "better than" other Christians. Leaders are not here to be served but to serve. We deeply apologize for not doing a better job, especially in the areas of respect, listening and meeting needs. We deeply desire for each part of the body to feel respected and for your God-given gifts to be used.

If you have conflict with any leader that you need help to get resolved, we recommend in the spirit of Matthew 18:16 that you pull in an elder or evangelist (or their wives) and another person of your choosing so that you can sit down together and truly get the matter resolved.

To ensure an open line of communication in the future, we wish to hold regular open meetings, so the elders and evangelist can be open to anything you would like to express. Also, in addition to our Board of Directors, we wish to develop other specially appointed committees in the church to make recommendations in such areas as Benevolence, Adoptions, Compensation, Facility Search and Improvements, and Budgets.

Please accept these convictions and apologies that we offer to you today. We are committed to being the humble, faithful and spiritual men that God is calling us to be and that you need us to be as your leaders. We ask for your prayers as we seek to make these and other changes. Please accept our sincere apology for the hurt and confusion that our sin has caused you. The dream we had the day we became disciples has not died. The mission is unchanged. One day we will stand before God as imperfect men but as "men who must give account." We deeply desire to see The

Nashville Church become the church that God wants us to be in every way. We earnestly seek your prayers, your ideas and your support both now and in the future as together with each of you we strive to this end.

Respectfully,

Barry Holt and Woody Rowe, Elders

Doug Lambert, Evangelist

March 19, 2003