

## **St Louis church leaders offer an apology to the church - March 12, 2003**

To our brothers & sisters in the St. Louis Church of Christ:  
the staff - Wednesday, March 12, 2003

### A CALL TO REPENTANCE

As we begin to understand where God is calling us to change and take it deeper in the days ahead, we want to take this opportunity to express our hearts to you and acknowledge some of the ways we recognize the sin in our lives and in our leadership has hurt you. During the past two weeks God has provided an open door of repentance for us to walk through as we have been confronted with sins of pride, arrogance, legalism and worldliness. We're sorry for not recognizing our sin sooner and very sorry for the pain it has caused you. We look forward to "producing fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8) in the days ahead and admit that we both want and need your help. We are committed to radical change and continual growth. Therefore, we realize there will be other things we will become aware of that will need to change that we are not aware of at the moment. We commit to you to have soft hearts so that we can hear the voice of God and commit to allowing God to use you to be that voice on a regular basis. Thank you so much for the patience you have displayed with us and the forgiveness we have already felt from you in this time of repentance.

### LEGALISM

Jesus warned leaders often about the dangers that legalism brings to true religion. Jesus came to a people whose relationship with God was dry and laced with rules and regulations that quickly developed into a system that made loving God from the heart very difficult to accomplish. Many of the people Jesus encountered were looking for a Redeemer who could bring them out of their "empty way of life." (1 Peter 1:18) They were hungry for change and change came. Jesus promised them life, and life to the full as he addressed the complete message of grace and truth and did away with man-made traditions. (John 10:10)

We have come to a conviction that we have allowed many areas of silence in the Bible to become areas where we have expected things done a certain way. Whether these expectations were spoken or unspoken doesn't really matter. Either way it was wrong and sinful and in direct violation of Scripture. (Romans 14) We made disputable matters with God, indisputable matters with man. We deeply regret our spiritual blindness in this area and are sorry for any hurt we have caused you as a result of this and the lack of respect we have given you to choose the path you believe God is leading you on. We greatly look forward to all of us serving God with the freedom we were always intended to enjoy. Legalistic practices have persisted in our church and they have hurt your faith. Practices such as--overly focusing on the giving of your weekly contribution and yearly mission's contribution in a manner that has been responsible for some of you giving more out of guilt instead of a cheerful heart; imposing dating guidelines as though they were Biblical mandates and not just advice; expecting attendance at camps, seminars and other costly church activities without enough sensitivity to your individual situations; stressing one-over-one discipling relationships as a mode of teaching and creating accountability; and over-emphasizing stats to move the ministry to achieve certain goals. Though advice,

accountability, discipling, giving and knowing the spiritual condition of the church are all very Biblical, when mandated or used in coercive ways, they become very hurtful and can take the heart and joy out of having a relationship with God.

## PRIDE

Overall, we have done a poor job over the years of including you in decision making, overseeing the church budget and mission's contribution, planning special events, setting visions and dreams for the church, and being involved in holding us more accountable for our lives. We realize this to be an ungodly and dangerous practice and are committed to showing true humility toward all men. (1 Peter 5:5) Our pride has at times caused us to misplace priorities and focus on the wrong things. This has resulted in us neglecting certain responsibilities as shepherds, not protecting you in the ways God calls us to. We feel we have neglected to tap into an incredibly valuable resource--you, the members of the St. Louis Church of Christ. This has caused some of you to feel unimportant or second rate and this is a clear violation of the atmosphere God expects in His church. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) We apologize for allowing this pride to be in our lives and we are committed to removing this worldly model and replacing it with one where all feel valued and important.

## ARROGANCE

We, as well as all of you, are being led by God to discover new and exciting ways to communicate the gospel to those in need of salvation. Though much of the information contained in the First Principles study series is crucial in coming to a saving knowledge, it can easily foster a works mentality on the part of the person studying the Bible and also with the person teaching the lessons. We see in the conversion accounts in the Book of Acts that, while they definitely were taught about Jesus and came to faith in Him, most were converted in a short period of time. Granted, there is no exact Biblical formula on how to study the Bible with someone and how long it should take for every individual to become a Christian. However, a longer and usually more drawn out process of conversion, with more of a focus on terms of discipleship, repentance and commitment, can lead people to develop a distorted picture of the grace of God. This distortion has also been evident in the restoration process of those wanting to come back to God. While we will continue, as Jesus did, to teach what it means to follow Him, we need to move away from a formula of studies and assignments which take an extended period of time just to make sure the conversion or restoration is "solid" in our opinion.

## EXPECTATIONS AND PRESSURE

We have come to the conviction that there has been too much challenging and expecting in our preaching and teaching, and not enough inspiring and encouraging. Some of this has been due to the pressure we have felt to perform at our jobs on a certain level and also the pressure we have put on ourselves to grow, at times with selfish ambition. We have on occasion given in to cowardice by not speaking up often enough, or loud enough with our leaders when we didn't feel resolved about certain direction. We have operated with misguided loyalties and at times committed our trust and loyalty to men more than to God. We are sorry for the times we have been insensitive in calling you to meet certain expectations that we as a staff have decided upon

or that have been passed on to us. In these situations, we have sinned by caring more for ourselves than we did for you, the people God has commissioned us to lead and protect.

We have also come to understand that we must provide more teaching on grace and being motivated by the greatest of all commandments--loving God. (Matthew 22:34-37) Along with that, a much greater understanding of our true freedom in Christ must come about in our church. We can then, and only then, begin to enjoy it and preserve it, never allowing it to creep back into our fellowship. To help bring this about, more emphasis is needed on true one another relationships and how to develop a deeper and more sincere love for every member. We have been guilty of too much reliance upon a system of leadership and trusting in ourselves and our wisdom to lead and direct you and not trusting enough that God's Spirit lives in each of you and empowers you to be the Christians God wants you to be. (Romans 8:9-11)

#### POOR SHEPHERDING; INSENSITIVITY TO HURTS

The history of the St. Louis church is storied with spiritual courage and acts of bravery. From the very beginning of its existence, the St. Louis Church of Christ has faced many challenging issues with leadership, leadership changes, persecution and many serious attacks from Satan. One of the biggest challenges many of you faced was in 1996 when many of the members moved away to support the Dallas church. These people were your close friends and many were key leaders in the St. Louis Church. In the months following, some of your friends chose to leave the church because of hurts and broken relationships. For the past six years, many of you have felt the hurt from those events and we have been insensitive to the depth of that hurt and the pain you are currently feeling. You should have been helped in much greater ways to move through this difficulty yet we were not spiritually aware and too aloof from your hurts to help you in this matter. For this we are very sorry and are grateful that you have persevered and remained patient with us.

St. Louis has also contributed a number of Christians to help plant churches in Tulsa, Columbia and Springfield and has sent others to be a part of church plantings elsewhere. For the past number of years, you have also met and exceeded the Special Contribution goals put before you, usually without complete knowledge and disclosure of how the money was being spent. A lack of true inspiration was felt by some, and too much focus was on duty and not desire. We realize now this must change and we must begin rebuilding your trust in financial matters involving the church and monies collected for Special Contribution. (2 Corinthians 8-9) We are eager to do this and understand the hesitation some of you may feel even at this hour in regard to your weekly giving and any future plans for a Special Contribution in 2003. We are truly sorry for putting any of you in this situation and pray God will use us and our repentance to free up your heart to enjoy giving once again.

#### OTHER SERIOUS MATTERS

Other matters of great importance are being addressed and eradicated. We now see clearly the dangers of one-man leadership and the abuses of the pillar church concept. Both have caused damage to this church. God is calling us to obliterate any and all church hierarchy and imploring us to destroy our arrogance in regard to the "one church" teaching. Though we must remain true

to the biblical teaching on conversion, our pride has caused us to look down on or ignore others who correctly teach the plan of salvation but are not a part of our immediate fellowship.

As a staff, we realize we don't have all the answers regarding where we will go from here. We are grateful for men like Gordon Ferguson, Henry Kriete and others for standing up, speaking out, and exposing the sin in our leadership. We are also grateful for many of you who have helped us to deepen our convictions in regard to these matters. We are seeing the past, and while many great things have been accomplished by the power of God in all our lives and in all the churches, we are saddened at the areas of sin we have been involved in, hurting over the people whose relationship with God was damaged due to our sin and spiritual ignorance.

Only God's perfect grace can allow us to continue to serve Him after understanding some of the consequences of our sin. (Romans 7:14-8:1) Yet the future is before us and that future is not yet completely shown by God. But we do believe God is with us as we repent and get back firmly onto His path. We truly believe He will continue to lead our church and care for each of us. As your leaders, we pledge to continue to display godly sorrow for these past sins and show much humility and godly sorrow for whatever may be pointed out as sin in the future. We commit ourselves to changing whatever is in our lives that prevents us from being the men and women God wants and needs us to be for you. We ask for, and thank you for your love, patience, forgiveness and prayers during these times. We love our God, this church and His people all over the world and are willing to do whatever it takes to please Him and help the St. Louis Church of Christ to glorify God.

In love,

The Staff of the St. Louis Church of Christ