

Letter Expressing our Resolve

Wednesday, April 09, 2003

Dear brothers and sisters in the Toronto Church of Christ,

We are writing this letter to let you know the convictions we have come to as a staff as a result of some deep soul searching over the last couple of months. We have had time for our hearts to soften even more, and want to make clear to you what we have collectively learned and resolved to change.

We have read many letters, e-mails and articles from around the brotherhood, including the letter from Henry Kriete. Many of the discussions we have had as a staff, in conjunction with writings addressing problems in our congregations, have helped us identify our sins as a leadership. We also want to thank the congregation for the much-needed feedback you have given us that has already helped to fuel changes in many areas. We are thankful to have had the opportunity to share with you the depth of our sorrow in person at our respective regional services, our Congregational Devotional on March 1, and the numerous meetings throughout the weeks that followed. We are encouraged by your kindness and forgiveness, while at the same time convicted by our sin and have shed many tears for the ways so many have been hurt.

This letter will in no way cover the entire scope of reform that we wish to bring about, yet we hope it will serve as a springboard for further discussion, and communicate the main areas we are resolved to change.

Leadership

The Past

- **Hierarchical structure**
- **Corporate paradigm**
- **Culture of fear**
- **Authoritarian one-man leadership**
- **Lack of respect for elders (candidates)**
- **Arrogance**

Our resolve for the future

"Not that we Lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm." 2 Cor 1:24

The paradigm for God's church that we see in the scriptures is one of a family. The family model emphasizes relationships instead of structure and love instead of authority. In a family the strong bonds of love seek to protect rather than to judge. We are resolved to do our best to ensure that everyone in the Toronto Church feels like a gifted and equally valuable part of God's family.

The New Testament describes a team leadership paradigm for the church, consisting of elders, evangelists, and teachers. A team of spiritually qualified leaders is necessary to make wise judgments and safeguard the entire flock. The scriptures direct the elders to oversee the affairs of the church. In our repentance we are determined to train and appoint qualified men as elders.

Team leadership also respects the unique gifts of all members of the body. Involving more people in leadership is essential for a healthy church. In the future, servant/advisory groups will be utilized in our regions to address specific needs of the church. The goal will be to have groups consisting of individuals who have been commended by the membership to work with us.

Discipleship

The Past

- **One over another relationships**
- **Ordered relationships**
- **Advice given as direction**
- **Legalistic dating guidelines**

Our resolve for the future

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." 1 Peter 1:22
Discipleship should occur as we help one another to grow spiritually. The scriptures teach that relationships in the church should be those that "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" while meeting one another's spiritual needs. We are "our brother's keeper" but should not make our brother (or sister) feel unbiblically confined about where to live, who to date, how long to have a quiet time and other "matters of opinion". We should practice being spiritual partners with one another by confessing our sins to each other and praying for each other. Instead of ordering such relationships, as leaders we will encourage peer discipling through one another relationships, based on mutual trust and friendship. The membership should have the opportunity to choose the relationships that they believe will encourage their own spiritual growth.

Motivation

The Past

- **Overemphasis on statistics**
- **Human pressure**
- **Insensitive accountability**
- **Arbitrary measures of spirituality**

Our resolve for the future

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." 2 Cor 5:14-15

The motivation for the Christian life should come from the cross of Christ. The cross is the source of all motivation used by God in the Bible. The cross is a demonstration of God's love for all men. The cross is what will produce godly sorrow over the sin in our lives. God's demonstration of love and forgiveness will produce conviction about sin. Gratitude for how much God has sacrificed for us should be fundamental in why we do what we do. God never desired for us to live in a constant state of guilt. We seek to have as our prime motivation, that which springs from gratitude for our Lord's sacrifice.

Finances

The Past

- **Financially over-extending the church**
- **Untimely expenditures**
- **Decisions influenced from outside churches**
- **Building up 'pillar churches'**
- **System of weekly accountability**
- **Giving under compulsion**

Our resolve for the future

"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Cor 9:7

We want to acknowledge the incredible sacrifice of the members; your generosity has resulted in great fruit in immeasurable ways. However, giving should be an act of worship to bring honor and glory to God. We recognize that God expects us to give financially, but we want to promote and encourage generosity based on a cheerful heart, not because of accountability. In the future we want to make you aware of the financial needs, but trust you to give entirely on your own free will. The concept of "free will giving" seen in the scriptures will henceforth also apply to us as a congregation, meaning that we will no longer as a congregation have financial decisions made for us by other congregations or pillar churches. We are committed to fiscal responsibility, shared by an active board of directors and teamwork between administration, ministry staff, and non-staff members.

Doctrine

The Past

- **Only ICOC=One True Church**
- **Culture of spiritual insecurity**
- **Lack of emphasis on in-depth teaching**
- **Not enough emphasis on grace**
- **Arrogance in teaching**

Our resolve for the future

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-- for all whom the Lord our God will call." Acts 2:38-39

The Bible teaches there is one way to salvation, which is through Jesus Christ and that when anyone becomes a true Christian they are baptized into God's church. Just as there can be members on the rolls of the Toronto Church whom God does not recognize as "saved", there are members of God's eternal kingdom outside of the International Churches of Christ. At the end of the day, God alone knows those who are His. God defines His church, not man. We are striving to be the church God wants us to be. We believe God will be the judge of all churches and all people. We acknowledge that some have been hindered from being a part of our fellowship, due at times, to an inherent arrogance, and lack of emphasis on grace. Much in-depth study is currently being done to revise our study series to incorporate our changed convictions, while keeping a hold on truth.

Once again we apologize to you for the sins that we have committed and tolerated. We will continue to make every effort to change, recognizing that this is a collective effort and needs to be on-going till the day we die! We ask for your patience as we change together as a church and as a worldwide fellowship. Our prayer is to humbly follow God as He leads us by His Spirit. We remain open to your on-going input and suggestions and are confident that God will continue to be gracious, as He guides us all.

Love in Christ,

The Ministry Staff of the Toronto Church of Christ