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## Vision

*The Message of the Boston Church Elders, May 4, 2003*

### Vision for and by the Elders -- An Introduction

Presented by Gordon Ferguson

Today will be a day in which a vision is presented *for* the elders of the Boston church, and a vision *by* the elders for the Boston church. Just over a month ago, after significant study by elders, evangelists, teachers and other leaders in the church, it was decided that the role of elder would take on new directions. A sermon was preached in each region regarding the role and qualifications of elders, in preparation for today's service of which we are calling an "affirmation" of our seven elders.

Two primary new directions of our elder group are a part of our ongoing repentance and restoration in the Boston church. One change is that all elders are now elders for the congregation, with no distinction between region elders and congregational elders as in the past. We are blessed with diversity in our present group, with three elders on the ministry staff and four not. We come from various backgrounds, with many different life experiences, all of which provides valuable perspectives in better representing our church membership. As more elders are added, this diversity will continue to increase. As for Wyndham and me, those who in the past had been the only ones designated as congregational elders, we are delighted to have five more sets of shoulders to share the loads elders carry!

The second change that the elder group has embraced is to now "direct the affairs of the church," in the terminology of 1 Timothy 5:17. We have no desire or intention to make all of the decisions for the congregation as a single group. Most ministry decisions will continue to be made at the region level by the leadership teams of our different regions. Additionally, the elders are getting valuable input from the evangelists, teachers and other respected leaders among the people. However, there are weighty decisions that we must make that significantly affect the future of the church, and we will, after much consultation with others, make those decisions. Please pray for us as we continue to develop in our leadership responsibilities as your elders, your servants.

One vision that we have for the church is to have much more biblical teaching provided for you and for the ministry staff. We want to continue what has been started in studying the role of elders, and study other biblical leadership roles, including the roles of evangelist, teacher, deacon and administrator. Also, we want to continue to study and

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teach more about the elder's role and qualifications. During the past month, observations and questions from you demonstrated the need for further teaching and clarification in this area. Therefore, in the near future, we will provide a teaching setting for all who would desire more in-depth biblical explanations and discussions about the elder's role and qualifications. Our goal is to change anything about leadership in the church that needs changing, but to have the Bible study and discussion needed before finalizing our directions along these lines. We thank you in advance for your prayers and your patience as we continue to restore God's plan for church leadership.

Serving as elders has become an even more challenging task in recent weeks, but we are more than willing to embrace the task for two basic reasons: we love God and we love you. You in the Boston Church of Christ are our family and our friends. We thank God and count it a privilege that our work directly involves those whom we love most in life. We are your servants and your friends who stand with you on level ground at the foot of the cross.

### **A Vision of Change**

Presented by Tracy Larr

In the last few months a number of changes have been made to better meet the needs of the congregation. The seven elders (three who are on staff, four who are not) have assumed responsibility for directing the affairs of the church. As Gordon has said, we look forward to doing much more study on the qualifications and role of elders and the adding more elders to the group as time goes by.

In the past two months the elders have conducted many meetings with different groups. We have frequently met with evangelists in the church to get their input and perspective and to make some decisions in concert with them. We have had very productive meetings with a number of men who have been recognized as teachers (staff and non-staff). With them, we have tackled some difficult issues and have received their input on how to provide deeper Biblical teaching to the congregation. We are in the process of meeting with each of the region leadership teams to better understand the needs of the region. We have met two and sometimes three times a week for 8-10 hours a week.

We are presently working on a new organization plan for the church that will eventually give us a balanced budget and provide resources where they are most needed. We especially want to insure that direction and support is provided for our teen and camp ministries. In each of our regions we are encouraging the development of leadership teams so that no one person is making all the decisions. Instead input and perspective is being provided by a number of godly men and women.

In response to concerns about staff compensation, we have moved to see that there is a review of the salary model that has been used for the last 15 years. Although this model was deemed in January 1999 to be "fair and reasonable" by an outside Washington D.C. law firm specializing in non-profits and churches, the board has heard and agrees that the rationale and assumptions behind the model should be re-examined.

To address this issue, the board of directors in its April meeting created a Compensation Subcommittee, consisting of the non-staff board members (Clarence Webster, Dr.

Wayne Chin, and John Martin). The subcommittee, along with the church's administrative staff, will work with the Hay Group, the premier consulting group in the world in evaluating and setting appropriate compensation levels for corporations and non-profit organizations. The objective is to generate appropriate salary ranges for each staff position based on such factors as level of supervision, knowledge required, and complexity of position. The ICOC hired the Hay Group last year to begin working on a new model and significant work has already been completed. In April, Hay began delivering the beginning results of its research and will begin working with the subcommittee in May.

To insure greater participation, in this review, the elders are calling for a non-staff Compensation Review Task Force composed of one non-staff member from each region of the church to be in place by May 31. This process will begin this week. On the BCC web site, there will be a link for any member to nominate someone from their ministry to serve on this Task Force.

The elders will review the nominations and choose 8 representatives to serve on this task force. The last day to nominate will be May 21. If you do not have a computer, please give your nominations to an elder or an evangelist. The task force and Compensation Sub-committee will have until August to present a final plan to the elders and Boston Board of Directors.

To address the issue of reimbursable ministry expenses, last January the non-staff board members worked with a task force of ministry staff members to create a *new policy*. This policy was approved by the board of directors and was put in place for all Boston Church staff this past April. A summary of the policy will be available on the Boston website by May 9. The board commends this new policy to the congregation and believes it addresses the concerns expressed by some disciples concerning this issue.

## **A Vision for the Future**

Presented by Tom Jones

Boston has been a unique church in our restoration movement for the last 24 years. You, the members of the Boston church, have been sacrificial in huge ways for the longest time, planting 58 other churches around the world (35 foreign and 23 domestic) and raising up and sending out multitudes of staff and non-staff people to serve throughout the world. We give glory to God for the grace he has given that has allowed us to be his fellow workers and serve in this way (1 Corinthians 3:6)

But where are we going now? What is our vision for the future? One thing is for sure you aim at nothing you will hit it every time. Yet, as disciples, we have much to aim for as we strive to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We believe that our God is able to lead us where he wants to take us. We believe God is able to do great things with us, who are but jars of clay, as we have great faith in him (2 Corinthians 4:7).

**First of all our vision is of a unified church.** With one heart and mind, your evangelists and elders have said, we want to work, think, act and react as one congregation--the Boston Church of Christ. We want to have a more definitive mind-set of sharing our resources--both our finances and our personnel--and to no longer let the region mind-set dominate and separate us. Instead we want to work together to see as never before "the body building itself up in love as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16).

**Second our vision is of a spiritually healthy and happy church.** We desire to see leaders in various roles (with some being staff and some non-staff) working together as ligaments of unity to equip the saints for works of service--for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12 RSV). There has been consensus among all leaders that the elders should serve as the overseers and shepherds with ultimate responsibility for the direction of the church, but we highly value our evangelists, teachers and administrators and recognize how imperative it is that we all work together in harmony as a team so that everyone's strength is used to build up the Boston church.

Our vision would include leadership groups made up of both staff and non-staff men and women in every region. Our vision is for every member of the Body to feel valued--and to know that all their God-given talents and gifts are wanted and needed to build up the body of Christ.

We want the Boston church to continue and grow as a church in which love is deeply experienced; where black, white, Asian, Hispanic, rich, poor, educated, uneducated, able-bodied and disabled, come together to serve God and to serve one another so that the world will know with certainty that there is a God--a God of love.

**Third, our vision is that the Boston church will be a missions church.** We deeply appreciate all the time, effort, sacrifice and money everyone has given into reaching the world for Christ. We have come a long way. We have a long way to go.

Since the first continental Europe church planting by the Boston church of Christ, we have been very focused in spreading the Good News of Jesus to Europe. Over the years the Boston church membership (as well as members from other churches throughout New England) have sacrificed thousands of dollars to support the mission work in Europe. In addition, a number of evangelists chose to relocate from New England to Europe with the mission of helping evangelize the continent. As a number of those evangelists now live in the Boston area, we will continue to offer their expertise and spirituality to the European churches in advisory roles, as the European churches continue to provide the Good News to lost souls, and strengthen the brotherhood.

We have a vision for our New England churches to continue to cooperate, help and work together to not only evangelize New England but to evangelize the portion of Europe that has been a part of our world sector.

We must be uncompromising about our mission emphasis. We call on every member, including ourselves, to share his or her life and to share the gospel with as many as possible. Even as we resolve issues within the Body, we believe we can and should and must give everyone the opportunity to respond to Jesus as we hold on to Jesus ourselves and hold out our Jesus to a lost and dying world.

So our vision is of a unified church, a spiritually healthy and happy church, and a mission-focused church. May God help us to these ends.

### **A Vision for Staffing and Finances**

Presented by Clarence Webster

Finally we want to speak to our vision for staffing and finances of the Boston church as we move forward under this eldership and leadership team of evangelists, teachers and administrators. The Ephesians 4 passage read at the beginning says that the church as Jesus intended it is to build itself up as each part does its work. That means the

membership, the individual disciples, build the church, not the leadership. The leadership is to equip you the members to do the work of the ministry by our teaching, preaching and example.

Your new elders group has wrestled with past practice and future changes needing to be made in terms of finances and staffing. We have shared some changes made and a very basic vision of what we want the church to be for the future in terms of biblical leadership and membership. The Bible does not speak to how many elders, evangelist or teachers a 3000-member church needs to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. It does speak to the spirit of financial giving each of us should have out of reverence for Christ and gratitude for our salvation and his ongoing grace. According to Scripture, we are to be sacrificial and generous; we are to be cheerful and not under compulsion; we are to give from what we have and not what we don't have. (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Chronicles 29:10-18, 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, 2 Corinthians 8:12-15). Those who have more are to give more, and those who have less are to give less so there will be a relative equality in what we each sacrifice.

Also by way of clarification--we have repented of our historical practice of using accountability to insure the success of a missions contribution. There will be no accountability or dry runs this year. Any attempt to define the amount needed by use of multiples is only to indicate the need as a benchmark of what it will take. We are asking for a free will offering and hope you, God's people, will respond according to the need and how God has prospered you.

As elders we believe our job is to call you to give to God in the spirit of the passages just referenced, and then to take your gifts to God and determine what staff we can keep or hire to best equip us all to build this church.

In light of this vision we want to present a response to our current financial and staffing situation. Since the beginning of 2003 our contribution has dropped an average of \$6,000 per week from where we began the year. This definitely affects our budget and financial responsibility to staff and provide facilities for the church.

We understand there has been much disturbance, as well as needed change, taking place throughout our fellowship here and around the world. We have sought to respond with humility and action as to the changes needed in the Boston church. We will continue to do so by seeking input and by the use of channels previously mentioned and more.

However, we also must make immediate decisions about balancing our budget as a church. Since the loss of Project Glory donations, we have been reducing a significant deficit with a remaining surplus from last year, but this cannot continue at its present rate. We must increase our weekly contribution and further reduce both our administrative staff and ministry staff. Nearly every region is running a deficit except for one. We cannot know all the reasons for this but understand the economy has been depressed, jobs have been lost and perhaps in times of turmoil and change, some of us are tempted with pulling back our hearts which can translate into our giving. The commitment of your elders is to balance the budget as we move into 2004.

We believe our current staff is a spiritually mature and seasoned group of leaders. They have been striving to respond to the learning curve of past mistakes and are eager for retraining and new vision as to how to fulfill their role. We do not have it all figured out, but we do believe we have the fundamental elements of change required to move to a healthy and improved dynamic with the membership. We believe, as Paul instructed Timothy, their "progress can be seen by all," and we are grateful for them.

We want to encourage you by good news we received this week that a reserve of money given at the beginning of our six-year missions plan has been redistributed to our world sector missions fund. This along with other reductions we made to our previously announced special foreign missions contribution will allow us to maintain our current mission obligations with a significantly reduced contribution this June. We had previously asked for an amount of \$2.2 million or 16 times our weekly giving. These changes allow us to reduce that request to \$1.4 million or 10 times our current weekly giving. That means over a third less than previously needed. That's not all the good news. We also believe, given further transitions from American leadership in Eastern Europe to national leadership, that we can keep the amount needed at this same level of need for next year.

Our appeal is to ask each of us, starting with us as your elders, to decide in our hearts what we can increase our weekly giving by to get it back to or beyond where we began in January. Once we see what your plan is for consistent weekly contributions, we will know what we have to work with as we strive to balance the budget. Our plan is to ask you to respond to this by realizing that God has blessed us with unexpected missions money from the past and hopefully freed us to give more on a weekly basis.

We want each of us to pray about this for the coming week. We will make further details available in the regions as to the new missions budget and need for weekly giving. We trust your hearts with these decisions and will manage our household for God according to how he prospers you and us. These decisions will be based on the new weekly contribution beginning May 18. We are asking you to trust God and support us moving forward as a united leadership and membership in the new Boston Church of Christ.

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