

A Call to a Unified Leadership Commitment

September 2, 2005

From: Brian Felushko, Evangelist, Vancouver Church of Christ
To: Any & All Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers

I want to suggest a different approach to building true unity amongst us and our churches than the one proposed by the L.A. Leadership. This one has nothing to do with statements of faith or signing on to a document, but rather involves each and every one of us who is considered an evangelist, pastor (i.e., elder) and/or teacher in any of our churches to make a unified leadership commitment before God to the people God has given us to shepherd. It is my conviction that if we make such commitment (or something like this, plus or minus certain points) and then follow through on that commitment, God's people would be greatly encouraged and their trust in godly leadership restored and/or built up and we will become more unified locally and globally.

I present this because I do not believe "signing on" to a statement of faith created by one leadership group is the answer to our unity issues. I would discourage us from having any kind of "signing up", ratifying or voting at our upcoming International Leadership Conference in Seattle. Structural or organizational unity is meaningless in the absence of relational unity and cannot take the place of us building truly loving relationships with one another and with all the people God has given us to lead. Perhaps I am naïve, but I truly believe that Jesus is the head of his church, that he is the only one we need and that he gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers "to prepare God's people for works of service". This, I believe, is Christ's plan for the unifying of his church.¹

If you're inclined, please read on. It is far from being perfect, or even polished, document (because I wrote it and though I did so prayerfully, given the current circumstances, it has not gone through many drafts), but I think it adequately expresses the perspective of this one evangelist who has almost 30 years of combined ministry training and experience; a perspective that might be worth considering. If it resonates with any of you and helps create healthy discussion among us and suggests another possible way we can approach having greater unity, then my purpose will have been accomplished. I take complete responsibility for all of this proposal's inadequacies and/or errors.

Our Unified Leadership Commitment

We, as evangelists, pastors and teachers, who are charged by the Spirit through the word of God "to prepare God's people for works of service"², commit ourselves to making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"³.

We begin by affirming our fundamental conviction that "there is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."⁴

¹ Ephesians 4:1-16

² Ephesians 4:12

³ Ephesians 4:3

⁴ Ephesians 4:4-6

We also affirm our conviction and trust that God has arranged the parts of the body just as he wants them to be and because even the weakest members of the body are indispensable, all members of the body are to be valued and loved.⁵

We additionally affirm our confidence that Jesus Christ, and he alone, is the head of the church, which is his body⁶ and that he continues to love and lead his church with patient persistence, no matter how it is doing at any given moment. Only he can remove a lamp stand from his presence.⁷

It is our firm conviction that the Holy Spirit inspired scriptures are God's complete word, without error and that these scriptures, properly interpreted and applied, are sufficient for the thorough equipping of every one of God's people for every good work that God has prepared in advance for us to do.⁸

The goal of preparing God's people for works of service and equipping the Christians for every good work is so that the body will grow and build itself up in love as each part does its work and that God will be truly glorified in the church throughout all generations.⁹

To that end we commit to you, by God's grace, that we will shepherd the church to the very best of our ability according to Biblical commands and principles. We promise to you, God's chosen people, that...

1. We will diligently study the scriptures, praying for wisdom, humility, faith and courage so as to properly understand, apply, personally obey and publicly preach all that is in keeping with sound doctrine. Our goal is to handle the word of truth correctly and to preach the word to you with great patience and careful instruction.¹⁰
2. We will respect each individual's free will, as granted to them by their Creator, while at the same time calling all disciples of Jesus to use their freedom in Christ, not to indulge the sinful nature, but to serve their fellow Christians, because of wholehearted devotion to the fellowship and a desire to love one another as Christ loves us.¹¹
3. We will respect each congregation's right and responsibility of self-governance, while at the same time doing all that we can to encourage and promote cooperation, interdependence and unity among all God's churches in all matters of doctrine and respect in all matters of opinion.¹²
4. We will become all things to all men, personally, so as to win as many as possible to Christ¹³ and encourage all Christians, according to their God-given talents and opportunities, to live daily as ambassadors of Christ, ministers of reconciliation and God's fellow workers, so that through us God can make his appeal to a lost and dying world: "Be reconciled to God".¹⁴
5. We will remember the poor by giving out of our abundance, so that others do not go without and we will call all Christians to give what they have decided in their hearts to give, imitating the example of Jesus, who became poor so that we could become rich.¹⁵

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 (esp. vv. 18, 22-26)

⁶ Colossians 1:18a; Ephesians 1:22-23

⁷ Revelation chapters 1 - 3

⁸ 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 3:16

⁹ Ephesians 4:16; 3:20-21

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-15; 4:1-2

¹¹ Galatians 5:1, 13; 6:1-2; Acts 2:42; John 13:34-35; Ephesians 5:1-2

¹² Romans 14:1-23;

¹³ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:1

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 8:13-15; 9:6-11

6. We will, in obedience to the apostle Paul's direct command, command the rich in the church to not put their hope in wealth, but to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and willing to share¹⁶ with the goal that a) there would be no needy persons among us¹⁷, and b) that those who preach the gospel may receive their living from the gospel¹⁸, both locally and globally.
7. We will show true love and respect for our fellow evangelists, pastors and teachers in keeping with 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a and when conflicts arise we will resolve our issues according to the principles and directives of such passages as Matthew 5:21-24; 18:15-17; Ephesians 4:29-5:2; etc. in order that Satan will not get a foothold and disrupt the unity of the Spirit.
8. We will heed Jesus' admonitions (as well as those of his apostles) to protect the church from the ravages of false teachers who would strive to lead many astray from the simplicity and commitment of the gospel.¹⁹ We commit to doing so by not being quarrelsome, but rather by confronting in kindness with the hope that even the false teachers would be led to repentance.²⁰
9. We will be shepherds of the church not because we must but because we are willing; not greedy, but eager to serve; not by lording it over the flock, but by being examples to the flock.²¹
10. We will strive to love God with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength²², to follow Jesus' example and obey his commands²³ and to love, feed and protect his church by pouring out our very lives in service²⁴ and to love and respect all the brothers more and more.²⁵

It is our goal to be a unified brotherhood²⁶ and encourage and equip every Christian to be his best and do his best to obey everything Jesus commanded²⁷, being faithful even to the point of death.²⁸ In so doing we pray that God, our gracious Father, will bless every effort prompted by our individual and collective faith²⁹, so that the church will grow and build itself up in love³⁰, as many as possible are won to Christ³¹ and God is truly and eternally glorified.³²

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 6:17-19

¹⁷ Acts 3:34

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 9:14

¹⁹ Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-3; 6:3-5; etc.

²⁰ 2 Timothy 2:23-26

²¹ 1 Peter 5:1-4

²² Mark 12:29-30

²³ John 13:15-16

²⁴ Philippians 2 (esp. vv. 3-7, 17-18, 20-22, 29-30)

²⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

²⁶ 1 Peter 2:17

²⁷ Matthew 28:18-20

²⁸ Hebrews 10:35-39; 12:4; Revelation 2:10; 12:11; 14:13

²⁹ 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

³⁰ Ephesians 4:16

³¹ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

³² Ephesians 3:20-21