

Letter from Elders and Evangelists of the SDCOC

Monday, September 05, 2005

To: The San Diego Church of Christ

From: The Elders and Evangelists

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Many of you are aware of the controversy being stirred up over the last few weeks by an article on the Portland, Oregon website entitled, "The Portland Story" in which Kip McKean unveils his plan to call out of our churches a remnant of what he considers to be committed disciples. Although we are committed to making disciples here in San Diego as well, it saddens us to say that his divisive statements are clearly doing more harm than good, and we are absolutely opposed to having anything to do with it here in the San Diego Church of Christ.

Rather than going into a lengthy exposition regarding our reasons for disagreeing with Kip's proposals, we urge you to read his article for yourself (www.portlandchurch.org) as well as some of the response articles such as those from Boston (www.Bostoncoc.org), Seattle (www.seattleicoc.org), and Phoenix (www.phoenixvalleychurch.org).

A separate issue that has come up recently which also deserves our attention is a call by the Los Angeles Church of Christ to a new brotherhood structure based on adherence to a statement of beliefs and practices itemized on their website in an article entitled, "Call to Brotherhood Unity and Revival" (www.laicc.net). While we applaud our brothers' efforts at unity, we are very reluctant to pursue it by means of structure and accountability since the tendency of human nature is to become more and more legislative and controlling, and we have no intention of ever being a part of something like that again. Here are some related articles for those who are interested: Phoenix (www.phoenixvalleychurch.org), St. Louis (www.stlchurchofchrist.org), Atlanta (<http://atlanta.icoc.org/>).

Where we are going

In light of these recent events, we would like to take this opportunity to lay out a clear, biblical explanation of our intention here in San Diego, so you can have confidence in your local leadership and the direction we are heading.

Theme passage: Ephesians 4:11-16

In this passage, the Holy Spirit uses the analogy of physical growth to illustrate the plan, purpose and pattern of our spiritual growth in his church, the body of Christ.

Plan of the church: to grow up

"until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ (Ephesians 4:13-15)."

In the same way that God intends for infants to grow up into mature adults, God intends for both individual Christians and local congregations to grow up into mature disciples and churches.

We are extremely grateful and forever indebted to the many mentors and tutors that God has used to help us grow and mature spiritually over the last 36 years since this congregation was begun by a small group of Christians in Poway. But we also recognize that as a child's relationship with his or her parents changes over time, so too a church's relationship with its mentors changes from an infant's dependence to an adult's independence and interdependence. For this reason, we do not intend to submit ourselves to outside oversight. We will instead continue to work in voluntary cooperative fellowship with our sister churches in the work of the Lord.

Purpose of the church: to become like Christ

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13)."

The goal of our spiritual growth is to become "mature" ("telios" = "complete; full grown"), which is defined in this passage as "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ", i.e. the complete and fully balanced character of Jesus Christ.

Through the trials and difficulties of recent years, God is calling us to mature in our Christ-likeness more than ever before. Among other things, we are learning how to be committed without being legalistic, how to be unified without being coercive, how to be connected without being codependent, how to be generous without being irresponsible, how to be nurturing without being sentimental, how to be honest without being hurtful, how to be forgiving without being superficial, how to be evangelistic and serving without losing a sense of boundary and balance, and how to take care of our own without being overly provincial.

The San Diego Church of Christ is committed to this kind of growth, and we as leaders will not abdicate our God given duty, but in love will steer the course of this church because we alone will be held accountable by God for keeping the goal of this church firmly and unwaveringly on maturing into the image of Jesus Christ, as this passage teaches.

Pattern of the church: local leadership inspires healthy, loving interdependence

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up... From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:11-12, 16)."

Since there are no longer any Biblical "apostles" or "prophets" in God's church today, it is left to the "evangelists", "pastors" (or "elders") and "teachers" to locally govern, shepherd and lead us as a family of believers.

We are very fortunate to have a team of elders, evangelists and teachers here in San Diego that are committed to doing what this passage commands us to do: prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up (vs. 12).

In order to fulfill this passage, we need every member to do their part, so that we can function more and more as ligaments for one another, supporting each other's spiritual growth in Christ (vs. 16).

When we seek godly input, advice and council from others outside our congregation, it will be without surrendering the God-given decision making responsibilities that God has placed squarely on our shoulders. We believe in the amazing power of a unified brotherhood and want to be an active part of the family of believers worldwide. We believe this can be accomplished best through the natural relationships that many of us in San Diego have already with brothers and sisters around the globe.

A bright future

Our vision for this church is that we will build on the lessons we have learned over the years and grow into a healthy, vibrant, and radiant church that shines brightly to the lost of San Diego county!

Brothers and sisters don't let the doubts and fears of Satan steal your joy! Don't focus on the wind and the waves that surround us -- focus instead on the Lord who stands before us!

Let us stand together, for "united we stand, but divided we fall".

All our love,

The Elders and Evangelists of the San Diego Church