

25 February 2007

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE DEAR SAINTS IN TORONTO:

We brothers have laboured and served in the church in Toronto for over 30 years. We treasure our years in Toronto with you in the Lord's recovery and the fellowship among the churches worldwide as the one Body. Our desire is to continue steadfastly in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles and in the healthy teaching that continues to be ministered through faithful brothers throughout His recovery. As such, we are grieved that some have accused us of working to control the church for Living Stream Ministry (LSM), the blending brothers and the Lord's recovery.

We write to you to clarify our concerns and desires and correct any misrepresentations. We also want to bring to light some of the actions taken by some of our elders and directors in recent months – all without fellowship with us (their fellow elders and directors), without our approval and apparently without adequate concern for the negative impact of their actions. These actions have created divisions and fear in the church here. Though we have endeavoured to meet with our fellow elders and directors to reconcile, they have purposefully excluded us from their fellowship. They have removed Brother Ron MacVicar from his role as secretary. At key times, they met by themselves, excluding us except for “last-minute” token meetings after the decisions had been made.

We want therefore to share with you what our desires are, to correct any rumours or misrepresentations about our purposes or those of the out of town brothers and co-workers we have fellowshiped with and try and explain why we feel the proposed actions of the other directors and elders will harm the church in Toronto.

Accusations about a plot by us with LSM, the blending brothers and the Lord's recovery.

Plotting to take over meeting halls or ministering Christ? Some of our elders and directors posted and distributed an article “Why an Early Business Meeting.” The article points to many brothers coming to visit from out of town as some sort of sinister plot. We grieve that they cannot celebrate the brothers' visits with us instead of seeing some ulterior motive. We have spoken with some of these brothers (for which we are criticized) and can share with you their testimony and stories. Some brothers came to Toronto at the invitation of brothers in nearby churches (Brampton and Richmond Hill). During their visits, they ministered to the saints concerning the vital groups and how to become vital through prayer and shepherding the saints. There has been no fellowship about “taking over meeting halls” or “taking over the church.” The article also incorrectly alleges that the “blending brothers” did not come here prior to their recent visits. A number of coworkers did come to Toronto and the Great Lakes area over the years when *they were invited* including Ed Marks, Dan Towle, James Lee, Minoru Chen, Benjamin Chen, Ron Kangas, and others. None came with presumption or overstepping their measure in the Body. The only reason they did *not come more often was that they were not invited*. Recently, their proper ministry has been attested to by the response of the 600-plus saints who joined the training in Brampton and Richmond Hill. For your enjoyment, and to listen for yourself to what was truly ministered rather than take someone else's word for it, those messages are available on the web at such sites as: www.lastadam.com.

Who wishes to remove saints from the Church? In that same article they accuse the Living Stream Ministry and “Blended Co-Workers” of wanting to install their “loyalists” in the Church here in Toronto and “throw out the full-timers (Nigel Tomes, Del Martin, Ian Brinksman, Richard

Yeh etc.) and their families.” This accusation can only be directed at us, the two elders in this local church who have not agreed with their actions. They suggest we would then seek “to lock these brothers out of the meeting halls and prevent them from serving among the saints.” They have said that by electing directors who are “one with the blended co-workers” (presumably us) this will “mean the Church in Toronto will close its doors to Titus and his co-workers” and that “the present co-workers—Nigel Tomes, Del Martin, Ian Brinksman, Richard Yeh etc.—and their families will be kicked out.”

Let us tell you clearly that this is not what we intend or want. We simply wish the fighting, the fearmongering, the scheming, the intimidation and the threats to end. The claim that LSM is attempting to exercise “remote control” over the church here and is attempting to control the affairs and activities of the church through us is utterly false and against our practices. If this were taking place, we, as your serving brothers, would reject such control. There has been no attempt by LSM to control the church in Toronto or us. Nor have visiting brothers attempted to control our actions, the church here or take charge of church affairs.

Let us also make it clear to the saints in the Church that it is not our desire or intention to “kick out” any of the current co-workers (Nigel Tomes, Del Martin, Ian Brinksman, Richard Yeh, etc.) or their families. Indeed, we believe that under the current by-laws of the church, the directors could not do that. Nor do we believe that is a role that the directors of the Church should have. It is only if their proposed by-law is adopted by the membership on March 4 that the directors will be given the right, for the very first time, to remove someone from membership.

Our desire is to ensure that we can meet peaceably. We have found ourselves pained and grieved because it is the actions of these elders and directors which seem to indicate a desire to control the flock. In their misguided attempts to protect these brothers (which they need not do, since we neither wish to nor have the power under our current by-laws to remove them), they have fallen prey to the temptation of excessively exercising the “control” they believe they have. We ask the readers to review the actions listed below and determine for themselves where the real danger of “controlling” is really coming from in the church in Toronto.

Controlling Actions Taken in the Church in Toronto

Use of Surveillance Cameras. As many of you know, a surveillance camera has recently been set up in the District 1 meeting hall 1 to record the meetings there. No meetings in other districts or in any of the other three halls in Toronto are recorded in such a way. This camera was set up without fellowship with us and has been in place for months. It is no accident that this camera was set up in a district where most of the saints still enjoy the riches of the ministry of the age. This drastic measure is unheard of in our history. Several times some of the elders have accused specific saints who meet in District 1 of various things while those cameras were running. The videotaping and those accusations may be used against those saints. The elders who have implemented this could one day turn this camera on any saint who runs afoul of their teachings and practice. Is this the kind of church we desire to have? Is this the household of God (Eph. 2:19)? We can only conclude that the purpose for that camera in this one district is to intimidate the attendees in that meeting – a true shame to the church leadership and an indication that some leading brothers do not trust in the operation of the Spirit. Rather, they rely on such devices to bring the saints into subjection to them. Is this not Nicolaitanism?

Control of Visiting Saints. Saints visiting meetings in Toronto have been confronted by some of the elders in a hostile fashion. The visitors have been interrogated regarding their motives for being in Toronto. Some have even gone so far as to *forbid* certain saints from fellowshipping with the saints in Toronto *unless they have the permission of the elders – even if those saints*

are related to them. When Rick Persad was called to have lunch with a local brother, he joyfully accepted the invitation. But when he arrived he was surprised to find that elder Bob Duncan showed up to ask him whether he had “permission” to meet with this local brother for lunch – a brother Rick had known for over 20 years and who once lived with Rick! He then called Rick a “wolf in sheep’s clothing.” Rick then proceeded to ask Bob if he needs the elders’ permission to meet with a saint who is his relative, and Bob said emphatically, “Yes!” Then when Rick stated that he had permission from Ron MacVicar and David Wang, Bob Duncan replied that these brothers were not part of the “functional eldership.” Do such actions testify of the “love for the brothers” that is the evidence that we have “passed out of death into life” (1 John 3:14)?

Claiming Themselves to be the More Powerful Elders. This novel term, stated by Bob Duncan of a “functional eldership,” appears to have been invented to justify actions taken without fellowship with all of the legitimate elders. They argue for two categories of elders: those who are a part of the “functional eldership” and those they wish to exclude. Why have some of the elders chosen to classify us as not being part of the “functional eldership”? Even more troubling to us is the notion that any elders, “functional” or not, have the authority to tell saints who they can *eat* with and who they can and cannot visit. This is contrary to the Biblical instructions on how to receive one another in the Lord (Rom. 14:1-12). We urge you to reject this type of illegitimate authority on the part of any elders or directors, including ourselves.

E-mails and Letters Threatening Discipline. E-mails and letters have been brought to our attention in which elders have threatened saints with “discipline” for attending meetings in Brampton or certain home meetings that are deemed “not in fellowship with the elders.” Discipline has also been threatened for distributing materials from Living Stream Ministry and for other reasons not supported by Scripture. For example, Steve Pritchard has threatened Ria Spee by e-mail that if she distributes to the saints certain materials that are not “approved by the elders,” she would be subject to “discipline.” Now, it seems, some elders and directors in their misguided efforts to bring the church under their command, are ready to “lower the boom” on anyone who they perceive to be in disagreement with their narrow view of how things should be conducted. This is further evidenced by their proposed by-laws that would bring in a fierce system of discretionary discipline under which anyone deemed to have “formed a party,” would be warned and then ex-communicated. Under such a system, anyone who is not favoured by two of the three directors could become the target of such authoritarian control.

Manipulating Young Saints against Attending the FTTA. Many of our young people greatly benefited by attending the Full-Time Training in Anaheim (FTTA), where they have been nourished with the truth, helped to experience life, to serve in the Body, to preach the gospel, and to shepherd new ones. Many of us can testify how much benefit we have personally received from such training. Recently, two elders of the church in Toronto – Steve Pritchard and Jonathan P’ng – spent over three hours attempting to manipulate the mind of a young sister who desired to attend the full-time training. They said that the training was “unhealthy” and could “damage” her. Fortunately, this young one is now in Anaheim attending the training along with over 300 other young persons from North America. Why would the elders make such a dramatic change in their stance without any fellowship or apparently any regard for our previous practice? Why would they hide their actions rather than openly fellowshipping among all the elders?

Rejection of the Video Trainings. For over 20 years, the church here has been under the healthy speaking of the leading brothers in His recovery. Now, without any fellowship with us, some of the elders terminated this practice. They will not allow the customary trainings to be viewed in the meeting halls unless they can “censor” the messages prior to viewing. If, as they state, all ministries are “ours” (1 Cor. 3:20-23), why do they prevent the saints from attending

the training meetings? The “food” dispensed at the last training was a very rich speaking from the book of Mark. Here is a little tidbit from the first banner: “When we live in the mingled spirit, we are learning Christ according to the reality in Jesus by the Spirit of reality so that His biography becomes our history to be the reality of the Body of Christ.” Surely there is nothing here that requires censorship, and such teaching undoubtedly benefits the church. Yet these same elders – Steve Pritchard, Jonathan P’ng and Robin Lao, among others – rejected this healthy teaching by requiring the training tapes to be subject to their preview – a move never before seen in the church here or elsewhere that we know of. This surely fulfills Paul’s warning to Timothy concerning ones who “will not tolerate the healthy teaching” and who “turn away their ear from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Home Meeting Invasion. A while ago, elder Robin Lao opened the door of a home unannounced where some saints were gathered so that he could look inside to see who was attending. He did not stay for the meeting, thus indicating to those assembled that he was checking on the attendees. This gave a strong sense to many that he was looking to control all who meet within the boundaries of Toronto.

Meeting at Hall 1. Robin Lao came regularly to intimidate saints attending a Saturday afternoon study session at the hall. He interefered with some of the small groups labouring on portions of the training messages by asking them who they were and where they attended on the Lord’s Day. Week after week he carried this out with the result that most of the Chinese-speaking saints ceased coming to the hall due to the intimidation, and our initial number of 40 to 45 shrank to 10 to 15. It was claimed that these saints were part of a divisive group, but this claim was never backed up. Rather, the control pressed several saints into discouragement that caused them to withdraw from the church life until the Brampton trainings were started.

Adding Many Members to Stack the Vote. We believe that the purpose of the early members’ meeting on March 4 is designed to give the elders all of the power they need to rule over the flock of God in an unscriptural way. Two directors – Steve Pritchard and Jonathan P’ng – not only have suggested this new by-law without fellowshipping with us and instead hired attorneys to draft these bylaws for them, but they have introduced a new membership process that deviates from our by-laws’ requirements in three ways. Firstly, they deny the ability of the membership affairs committee to review and approve prospective members. Instead of the broadly based oversight of 18 saints, they say that 2 of the 3 current directors can determine who to reject or admit. Secondly, they have introduced new criteria that we have never used and are not sanctioned by our by-laws. Thirdly, they propose to add many members instead of limiting the number of new members to 10% of the current members as has been our practice. That last practice helped provide continuity in our church. These changes are their schemes designed to prevent a fair vote by only admitting people (and many more people at that) who will help them win the vote to change the by-laws and give themselves power. We do not believe this is right and legal and are prepared to challenge this to ensure that these directors comply with the law and our own church regulations. Nonetheless, it shows how far they are prepared to go, regardless of whether it is fair and right to do so.

Removal of Those Who Disagree. Recently, after many years of service, Ron MacVicar was removed as the secretary of the corporation. To date, Ron has not received any explanation for his removal. Now some directors and elders have proposed a slate of directors which excludes David Wang. Just yesterday David Wang was removed as president from the board of directors after 14 years for no specific reason. Is this not a takeover of the church by certain individuals for their own purposes? In a recent letter, they claim that we have “no right” to any position and that it is normal for the directors and officers to change over time. Of course, this is true and we are not here to fight for any position. But this misleading statement is two-faced – the only ones

they are “changing” is us – ones whom they have practically chosen to exclude from the “functional eldership” without any fellowship. Meanwhile, rather than offering to step aside themselves, they are amending the bylaws so that *they remain in office for another THREE years* during which there will be no general elections! Is this not the uttermost in hypocrisy? While it was stated that David recently moved out of Toronto, that was *almost 15 years ago* and was not of any concern to anyone until recently. They said the alleged “requirement” to be a resident of Toronto was inadvertently left off the 1994 by-laws, yet in the Letters patent documents both Allen Jones and David Wang lived outside the boundaries of Metro Toronto before the new bylaws in 1994. It shows the date of David’s election as president as well. To us, serving the Body as a director or secretary has no value aside from how God works through us, but we are concerned that it is unhealthy if our leadership is composed only of those who believe they should not be accountable to the saints. Their proposed by-law certainly indicates that they believe they should have all of the power to do what they believe is best.

We, as the Lord’s servants, have endeavoured to faithfully minister to your needs for many years. Now forces beyond our control are rising up to lead the church in a direction that deviates from the vision and practice we have mutually acknowledged. The disturbing actions listed above are foreign to the Body of Christ and have never been practiced in the church here. The actions of these elders are in stark contrast with Peter’s admonition in 1 Pet. 5:1: “Therefore the elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ....Shepherd the flock of God among you, *overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God....Nor as lording it over your allotments* but by becoming patterns of the flock.” These actions also contradict the biblical admonition to serve “...as a slave” (cf. Acts. 20:19).

Based on such actions, we felt we had to write to you as brothers in Christ who have served the church here for over 30 years. Until now, we have withheld public comment in hope that the situation could be restored and we have attempted to reconcile ourselves and urged the directors to cease this controlling behaviour, but the extreme gravity of the actions listed above has caused us to speak out – the stones must cry out (cf. Luke 19:40)! We cannot agree with the above actions and believe that many of you share our conviction concerning the current leadership in the church and the draconian actions some have taken to seize control of the flock of God.

At the next general meeting we urge you to do two things.

1. Nominate and vote for brothers who desire to serve the flock as slaves rather than those who wish to control the flock.

2. Vote against the new by-law and do not permit our directors to seize power for themselves.

Your brothers in Christ,

David Wang

Ron MacVicar