

A MEMBER OF
The Confederation of
Reformed Evangelicals



from the ministries of
CHRIST CHURCH

December 2, 2004

Dear saints at Christ Church and Trinity Reformed,

Grace and peace to you all in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As your pastors and elders, we wanted to write you with a brief word of encouragement. Over the course of the past couple of years, our churches have borne the brunt of all kinds of slanders and attacks. "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets" (Luke 6:22-23). We are very grateful to God for all the blessings that He has bestowed upon us during this time, including the fact that He has allowed us to suffer for the sake of the gospel in this way (Phil. 1:29).

But one of the central blessings for us in all of this has been how you all as congregations have responded to it. We have noted the cheerfulness and kindness you extend toward us and one another, and we believe this is a central reason why the adversary has been so unsuccessful in their attacks on us. Many of you have told us how you are praying for us, and we are very appreciative. We believe God has heard your prayers and we have been helped to stand in the midst of much hostility. Likewise, we have been praying for you, that God will continue to increase your love to overflowing.

The central point of this letter is simply to echo the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:13: "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing." What you have been doing in your love for the brethren, we urge and ask "that you increase more and more" (1 Thess. 4:10). We are honestly very proud of you, and we are honored to be associated with such congregations. St. Paul says that the Thessalonians' love for the brethren was commendable, and he was simply urging them to more of it. He was concerned that the Thessalonians not "be shaken by these afflictions," and that was the context of asking for them to abound all the more in walking and pleasing God. We feel the same way.

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We particularly want to thank you for the way you have been careful to guard your tongues. Over the years, we have sought to emphasize what the apostle James teaches us about the tongue (Jas. 3:8-12), and we have been very thankful (given the circumstances), how little idle talk and gossip there has actually been. If slander and gossip were electricity, these congregations, taken as a whole, are a very poor conductor. We do not take this for granted, but sincerely thank you and our Father in heaven for this sign of His blessing among us.

Ironically, this has meant that those in our community who *do* have an "axe to grind" have often gone unanswered. Specifically, we are speaking of anonymous attackers, those who just fire off their complaints in the newspaper, or those who complain to others in our congregations. Of course, those who have come to us with sincere questions, we have always endeavored to answer fully.

Because of these *few*, from time to time you have heard references from the pulpit to the "fellowship of the grievance." One point of this letter is to assure you that we by no means generally characterize the congregations this way. Actually, it is *quite the reverse*. We do not define "grievance" as simply a divergence of views within the church (we have divergence of views on our sessions of elders). Rather, a grievance is a complaint, a gripe, a disagreement that is advanced in an unbiblical way (i.e. talking with others about their disagreements rather than going to the appropriate person(s) to resolve their disagreements). When a grievance takes hold, the result is complaining to others—often with a resentful attitude. When people gather together to complain in this way, the complaint becomes their point of fellowship. This helps explain the remarkable "coalition" in the community against us (e.g. homosexual and abortion rights activists and evangelical Christians together!).

- With churches our size, and under the general circumstances, it would be unusual in the extreme to have no one in our midst who is disgruntled in such a way. As you know, a small handful of people have left, and it is possible that another handful will follow them. We wanted you to know that the elders are aware of these small pockets of discontent, places where people have not been guarding their hearts and tongues as they ought to have. In most cases, they are grumbling among themselves, spreading discontent like a virus, unwilling to talk with us directly, but spreading things to others who are not in a position to answer their questions, or hold them accountable for their words. As elders, we have been striving to deal with these folks in a biblical manner, but we have gotten to the point where addressing these problems may bring some of this discontent out into the open, and hence this letter to you now. If this happens, please do not be surprised by it, or unsettled in any way. As far as we are concerned, this is simply the next step.

We do *not* believe it is a sin to disagree with us, to bring concerns to us, or even to disagree to the point of needing to leave our church. And we want you to know that we take seriously our need as elders to be genuinely open to correction ourselves. Over the years, we have extended the right hand of fellowship to a number of members who have left for various reasons, and in an honorable way. And we are always willing to transfer members to another evangelical church. But we do believe it is a sin to leave *any* church in a grumbling, discontented manner—and it is a bigger sin to *remain* in that church while grumbling in the same way. The issue as we see it is the grumbling, bitterness, resentment, murmuring, and

so on. The Bible says that this kind of bitter root when left unaddressed will spring up and defile many: (Heb. 12:15). And that is why we as elders are resolved to not leave this kind of thing unaddressed.

We are not asking you to do anything differently than what you have done. You have blessed us with your trust and honored us with your willingness to be led by us (Heb. 13: 7, 17). We appreciate your continued prayers that God would give us wisdom and strength as we strive to shepherd this congregation faithfully. God bless you, and thank you again for your faithfulness.

Your fellow servants in Christ,

Douglas Wilson
Mike Leary
Duffin
Chris Smith
Wesley & Shelly

Peter Blakey
Justin Gray
Jim Power
Pattat
Cort