

September, 2005

## **Changing for Church Health and Growth**

I have been reminded recently of the awesome responsibility and privilege of being God's church. When Jesus Christ left the earthly scene in the gospels, he clearly designated the church to carry on Kingdom work. Jesus intended the disciples to build churches to transform the lives of people in communities. He said that the job would only be done when the whole world has been transformed. He promised to be with us and ensure our efforts would succeed.

### **Back to Our Roots**

As I reflect on our movement, I am challenged by how fervent the founding generation was with that mission. But I am concerned by how far short we have fallen these past 20 to 30 years. During this past year, I have seriously considered how Florida Church of God Ministries needs to be a part of the solution. As I have shared in the past, I am willing to do whatever it takes to see the Church of God effect change throughout Florida.

### **State Ministry in the Scriptures**

Have you ever thought about where state ministry is identified in Scripture? I am convinced that part of the problem is that many churches expect the state to do the church's work and the state has expected the local church to do the state's work. This is similar to when people in the church expect the Pastor to do the work of the ministry. The laity leads while the pastor fervently and wearily does the work of ministry. Obviously, Ephesians 4:11-12 clears up the pastor-church responsibilities for us, but what does the Bible tell us about state ministry?

From my study of scripture, I believe Paul's ministry is a model for state ministry. He coached pastors, challenged churches to step up to their responsibilities, and planted and nurtured churches through other churches. He was held accountable by the Jerusalem council, he addressed issues of conflict, and he held churches accountable to their mission. The local church's responsibility was and is to transform lives in their communities, region and world. The state's responsibility is to help churches expand the Kingdom in a healthy and synergistic manner. Just as the pastor's role is to equip the saints for ministry, I see that my role is to equip the pastors for their equipping.

### **Back to the Future**

This is somewhat of a shift in thinking from what we've known over the past 20 years; however, it appears to me to be exactly in line with the biblical model AND the model our founders used to launch our movement. If you study our founders, you will find they were very catalytic leaders who challenged, coached, and started ministries. There was a level of chaos as the movement took this message to every corner of the world. With the chaos came growth.

Yet, there came the necessary shift of organizing the chaos and producing organizations. This essential step allowed our movement to be more than a passing fad. However, I believe we became locked into this organizational phase and didn't continue the cycle of transforming organizations—that is to repeat the process (from chaos to organizing) again and again. Form should always follow function. When we know our mission, our forms should support it.

### **Necessary Changes**

In light of this, the governance committee is recommending new by-laws be adopted during this next meeting of our General Assembly/Florida Ministerial Fellowship. This committee has been working in one form or another for several years and their recommendations point to establishing

a leadership board (State Elder board) that will provide accountability for me and the staff to carry out our mission.

The previous model of a multitude of boards and committees is replaced with pastors leading churches to do the work of ministry. We are also proposing that it is time for the two state assemblies to come under one umbrella. You will see this in the new by-laws as well. We will expand the Kingdom together as we appreciate our cultural differences and allow them to spur us on to more effective and balanced ministry.

The shepherding of pastors and churches is essential for the vitality. I am as committed to this as I have ever been. God provided us with the unique opportunity to provide this through our cohorts (SHAPE ministry). Because of the gracious gift of the Lilly Foundation and the concerted efforts of Jeannette Flynn and her team, we have been able to create a ministry that is changing the way we train and encourage pastors in the state. We will continue this approach long after the SHAPE grant monies are gone. Shepherding will not take place through a state representative visiting pastors; it will take place through clusters of pastors meeting every month for training, encouragement and challenge. This model is already working – just ask the 25 pastors who are currently participating in SHAPE.

Beginning September 1, Doug Talley came on board as our State Church Health Coach. (See the article about Doug and Cindy on page 5.) Doug's primary assignment is to aid me in the coaching of pastors and churches to new levels of effectiveness in ministry.

### **Embracing Deep Change**

We have a history of seeing healthy churches multiply in Florida; this must continue. To continue being effective we must keep changing. Personally, I have committed to the changes by resigning from my national board (Ministry Council) position to allow me more time to focus on leading Florida Church of God Ministries.

Change is inevitable, but it can be disconcerting as well. I am asking you to pray about allowing us to replace our existing by-laws with these new ones that will allow us to grow into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If after five years, you don't think we are more effective, I would be happy to bring the old concept back.

At this same time, by approving the new state bylaws, you will have an opportunity to affirm my leadership of this new organization. I believe God has called me to such a time as this. As you can tell, this past year has been one of sharpening our focus on how to change the world...one church at a time.

Your brother,

*Greg*