



CENTRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Shepherds

- Larry Bonner
- Mark Prowell
- Joe Ragan
- Delbert Richardson
- James Slack
- Paul White

Ministers

- Pulpit — Eli Borden PhD
- Involvement —Moses Hall Jr.
- Spanish—Fernando Rosas

DEACONS

- Danny Bebout.....Adult Bible Classes
& Small Groups
- David Powell.....Benevolence
- Ed Bond.....Budget & Finance
- Randy Odom.....Building
- Charles White...Fellowship & Seniors
- Jesus Herrera.....Grounds
- Dick Bodeker.....Hospitals
- Moses Hall.....Evangelism
- Dick Donovan.....Visitation
& Communication
- Brad Jackson.....Worship
- Carroll Andrus.....Youth (Teen)
- Alfonso Hernandez....Spanish Assemblies
- Estevan Guerrero . Spanish Family Care
- Alfredo Riojas.....Spanish Outreach

Sunday Assembly Times

- Bible Class 9:30
- Worship Assembly 10:30

Evening

- English..... 6:00
- Spanish 6:00

Wednesday

- Bible Class 7:00
- Wednesday**
- Ladies Class 9:30

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

After the congregation selected new Elders in 2004, a Mission Statement for the Central body of Believers was presented: *“Central church of Christ exists to equip, empower, and encourage everyone to do God’s will, which includes loving and presenting the indescribable gift of Jesus Christ to the world.”*

Of the many matters that could have been mentioned in our Mission as *“God’s will”*, the Elders purposely focused on two essentials: *1) love; and 2) sharing Jesus with others*. While all of God’s will is important, we firmly believe that more dedication needs to be given toward love for each other and in our efforts to save the lost around us.

For much too long, regrettably, Central’s emphasis upon these two focal points has been diverted because we have been mired in disagreements over worship practices and ministry methods which some consider *matters of faith*, and others consider *matters of opinion*. Rather than specifying each issue, we prefer to present general principles that should apply to all matters. However, if you desire to discuss specific issues after your review of this letter, please contact an Elder to schedule a convenient occasion to do so.

First of all, the Elders recognize that each member at Central is a unique individual with a very special, personal relationship with God and His Son. We individually develop diverse personal preferences and opinions in the exercise of our faith for which it is likely we will never come to full agreement, even after diligent Bible study, prayer, and deliberation. Scripture identifies these matters as *“doubtful, disputable, or opinions”* (Romans 14:1). As to such matters, the Elders have been called upon to draw lines and lead in such a way as to favor or disfavor a respective position as absolutely *right* or *wrong*. We believe it is virtually impossible to avoid conduct that meets with the approval of every opinion or preference; yet, to arbitrate and advance one position of opinion over another as right or wrong, in our minds, would be to pass judgment on our brothers and sisters in Christ and fails to accept one another as Christ receives us, despite our differences.

The Elders’ desire is to neither advance nor condemn matters of opinion as *right* or *wrong* that *must* be practiced or avoided as essentials of salvation. Opinions should never rise to the level of sacred commands and principles that are unmistakably identifiable as essentials of salvation. But as to any and all practices, we urge each member to *“be convinced in his own mind”* as to God’s will for your conduct in all things, not violating conscience and accepting one another, mindful of our responsibilities toward one another, and serving to the best of one’s ability and understanding. The Elders sincerely desire to lead and encourage everyone to accept and love one another and move on with sharing Jesus and His saving grace with others. Seeking and sharing Jesus with the lost is unquestionably an essential for which we must be unified as a primary mission.

Secondly, let there be no doubt that the Elders also acknowledge the existence of *salvation issues* and essentials of our faith that are unshakable for which there should be no dispute, doubt or opinions among us: *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you*



were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.” (Ephesians 4) Rest assured, on such matters, we are unalterably united. Although the Elders do not desire to draw lines on matters of opinion, we affirm that where scripture is clear as to the will of God, we will do our utmost to lead Central in such a way as to *“equip, empower, and encourage everyone to do God’s will”*. After studying God’s word for many years, most of us recognize that some Bible teachings are very important and clearly revealed in all respects, while others are not as clear, less important, and more subject to differing opinions.

Wise Christian leaders of the past once expressed the following restoration principle:

“In essentials of faith unity, in opinions liberty, and in all things, love.”

The Elders share such reasoned perspective.

In our individual exercise of the **"one faith"** to which we are called, each of us also develops our own **"personal faith"** perspectives, beliefs and practices. We sometimes find it difficult, though, to understand and accept others with different **"personal faith"** perspectives, beliefs and practices. One person deems a certain practice a *"matter of faith"* while to another person the very same practice is a *"matter of opinion"*.

Difficult as it may be, we must each answer the question as to whether a matter is one of **"personal faith"**, or one that is essential to salvation in the **"one faith"**. In all our leadership decisions the Elders will continually give prayerful study and deliberation to discern and teach that which is truly essential to obedience to the will of God in our calling in the **"one faith"**, while at the same time respecting the liberty in Christ for our **"personal faith"** perspectives, beliefs and practices.

The distinction between **"personal faith"** and **"one faith"** is revealed in Scripture. In **Romans 14:22**: Paul asks: *“Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God.”* Here, *faith* refers to a person’s particular belief that is actually only his opinion or scruple. The examples which Paul gave of this “personal faith” involved dietary practices and observing of holy days. But, this is not the same *faith* that refers to the basics of Christianity, such as **Galatians 3:25**: *“But after (the) faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor,”* and **Jude 3**: *“Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”* The two faiths are a distinction between essentials and nonessentials. This is why Paul would tell one with a personal faith scruple: *“have your faith to yourself before God”* and to follow one’s conscience and abide by personal faith, but it was not something to be imposed on those who have no such scruple.

The Elders are committed that Central must be united to contend for and defend the essentials of the **"one faith"** for salvation through obedience to the gospel and on matters where the Bible speaks clearly. Paraphrasing the restoration principle, we desire to proclaim: **“On salvation issues, we will insist upon unity; on opinions, liberty; and in all things, love.”**

In 1830, Brother Alexander Campbell wrote in response to a question whether unity can ever exist in the midst of opinions: *“Men cannot give up their opinions, and, therefore, they never can unite”, says one. We do not ask them to give up their opinions. We ask them only not to impose them upon others. Let them hold their opinions; but let them hold them as private property.* (Millennial Harbinger, 1830, p. 145) The Elders plead with you to do your best to do what God has clearly revealed, show mutual respect for one another’s opinions without condemning one another, hold your opinions, but hold them as personal matters of faith without condemning one another, and *“above all things, put on love which is the bond of perfection.”*

The guiding principles are to refrain from judging and love one another with respect to matters of opinion, for Paul wrote: *“Let us stop pursuing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother.”* (Romans 14:13). It is critical that Central be a body of believers who



practice acceptance and love concerning “personal faith” matters rather than scrutinize and judge one another over our differences of opinion. Please do not judge another’s love as dependent on them accepting and following all of your “personal faith” issues; instead, look into your own hearts and judge your own love in the context of how you respect and accept brothers and sisters in Christ who differ with you.

The Elders are charged with the exciting, yet difficult task of charting the course for Central to fulfill her God-given mission of the church to seek and save the lost. We have no doubt that everyone at Central agrees upon the essentiality of this mission. However, good and God-fearing brothers and sisters decidedly differ as to how to best fulfill such mission. Changes are called for by some and changes resisted by others. While God’s revealed Word never changes, the Elders sincerely believe that an ever-changing society can be better reached by continual evaluation of the effectiveness of our ministries, and where necessary, changes to better meet the needs of others to successfully fulfill our God-given mission. Even in the first century as recorded in I Corinthians 9, the Apostle Paul utilized change in his personal ministry practices: “*I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*”

As candidly confessed earlier, leadership focus on fulfilling our mission has been diverted due to discord at Central, and we are neither loving as we should (respecting and accepting differing “personal faith” issues) nor sharing the gift of Christ as we should (the essence of “the faith” – the gospel). We all must change and do better!

So, you may ask, how will leadership determine the need for change and implement change? Consistent with our earlier words, the Elders do not desire to establish a set of “personal faith” rules among us that *must* be followed as hard-fast protocol to follow on leadership-led changes. With the mere passage of time, leadership personnel change and experience may lead the Elders to have a different approach. Although the Elders do not have a pre-determined “change agenda” on any matter, we nevertheless would like to share our intended thought-process concerning future decisions. It is essentially three steps.

STEP ONE: COMMUNICATION ABOUT THE NEED FOR CHANGE:

Before the Elders implement any change, we intend to *inform the congregation* about the following matters:

1. The *reason for change* as it relates to the church’s God-given mission;
2. *How the proposed change is intended to meet an agreed-upon goal* in fulfilling such mission; and
3. An *explanation of the Elders’ analysis of Scripture* concerning the agreed-upon goal of the church’s God-given mission, and how the proposed change is not inconsistent with scripture, but rather, needed to better fulfill such mission.

STEP TWO: CONGREGATIONAL INPUT:

Before implementing change, we intend to seek *dialogue with the congregation* regarding the Elders’ stated reason for change, the agreed-upon goal in fulfilling the church’s God-given mission, and whether the proposed change is in harmony with Scripture.

The Elders shall attempt to *specifically solicit responses* from any particular category of membership that *is most affected* by the proposed change.

Unless necessary to conform to Biblical teaching, *change shall not be made* if there is *major opposition* from the congregation; however, a *negative minority shall not prevent* the implementation of change unless determined to be inconsistent with Scripture.

STEP THREE: CHANGE TRANSITION:

To the extent possible, we intend for any proposed change to initially be implemented as *an addition, not a*



replacement of an existing practice. After a pre-determined *“trial period”*, the change would be *evaluated* in terms of meeting the agreed-upon goal in fulfilling the church’s God-given mission. After such evaluation, a decision would be made for *abandonment* of the change, *modifications* to the change, or long-term *commitment to* keeping the change.

In sharing these steps, though, we want you to be mindful of two important considerations: One, due to the nature or urgency of a particular matter needing action, it is impractical to expect the Elders to absolutely follow the steps for each decision, so we ask for your understanding, mercy and prayers during those times. Second, inasmuch as most of our decisions are choices among many choice alternatives that are not essential in **“the faith”**, not everyone will agree with our choice. In such event, our choice is never intended to cause one to violate conscience, impose our opinions upon you or belittle your “personal faith” choices. We encourage you to continually be in the Word, prayerful, and Spirit-led, being “fully convinced in your own mind” by “working out your own salvation with fear and trembling”.

Brothers and Sisters, please accept the Elders’ plea to help refocus Central on the essentials of **“the faith”**, to accept and forgive one another in the exercise of our liberty of **“personal faith”** opinions, and in all things, love as we seek *to equip, empower, and encourage everyone to do God’s will, which includes loving and presenting the indescribable gift of Jesus Christ to the world.”*

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