

June 17, 2014

Dear Brother K.P. and Gospel for Asia leaders,

It is with a heavy heart that we write to you. As you know, we spent several years of our lives at Gospel for Asia (GFA) dedicating our work and much of our personal lives to GFA's ministry. We would say that we learned much there, and as we look back on that time, we are thankful for many things. Personally, we have been positively impacted and challenged by the lives of the leaders at GFA in a number of areas, particularly in the areas of concern for the unreached and spending time in prayer. We are no longer with GFA, but we still love and appreciate you, and we believe that God is using GFA in Asia to see many people come to know Jesus. And we rejoice in this.

At the same time, just because God is blessing a ministry does not mean God is pleased with everything that the ministry is doing. The Lord once told Moses to speak to a rock. He struck it instead and God was so angry with him that Moses and Aaron did not enter the promised land because of it. But enough water flowed out of that rock for 2 million people. So we believe God is blessing GFA, we are thankful for many things about GFA, and we consider you all to be friends and brothers.

But we are deeply concerned about five key issues at GFA — not just for the USA office, but also in Canada and at least some of the international offices, as well as on the field. We write out of a desire to be obedient to Scripture, out of a concern for the glory of God and out of concern for you and the staff at GFA and the congregations of Believers [Episcopal] Church. We have seen that Gospel for Asia leadership engages in the following five ongoing actions. We see each one as sin, and each one is damaging the lives of many staff families:

## **1. GFA leadership practices and teaches a false view of spiritual authority.**

GFA leadership teaches that K.P. doesn't just have limited authority as an employer, but also has authority over the personal life of the staff. It is commonly taught that K.P. and GFA leadership speak for God. Staff are not encouraged to search the Scriptures when given directives from leadership and are directly told not to pray about them. Instead, they are taught to unquestioningly obey all requests apart from very obvious sin. Even something as major as moving to Burma should be obeyed unquestioningly. K.P. once said at a prayer meeting that it would be sin to say "I'll pray about it" instead of "Yes sir," were he to request you move to Burma. Daniel P., John B. and David C. specifically have asserted on numerous occasions that staff must submit unconditionally to anything K.P. or leadership asks of them, even with respect to their families and personal lives. They teach that God will not hold a staff member accountable if they sin in following GFA leadership. They teach that only GFA leadership would be accountable in the event that leadership steered them wrong. This is a false teaching, very similar to the the Shepherding Movement of the 1970s. GFA leaders have also told some staff who wanted to leave that they didn't approve them leaving, as though they would be in sin by rebelling against the God-appointed leaders of their entire lives if they leave.

On the field, K.P. functions as an episcopal bishop, with the title, "His Eminence (or H.E.) Most Reverend Dr. K.P. Yohannan, Metropolitan Bishop," and wears the robe, hat, ring and some other accompanying items. Staff and leaders there commonly kneel or bow and kiss K.P.'s ring in a sign of veneration (some of us are witnesses to this and one former field leader says "everyone" does it.)



"His Eminence, Most Reverend Dr. K.P. Yohannan, Metropolitan Bishop" at Leaders' Meeting in India

- We believe this is not how Jesus taught and modeled authority. He Himself was a servant and washed the feet of His disciples, and they did not accept veneration from others or act as high priests.
- Biblically, not even bishops and elders have the authority to become mediators between God and men, as there is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 2:5)
- Christian leadership is to be "not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:3) "But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you." (Mt 20:25-26)
- Leaders in the Church are given authority in order to edify and build up, never to boss their fellow servants around. "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (Jn 13:13-14) "...set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." (1 Tim 4:12)
- "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church" (Eph 5:22-23) Husbands are to lead their wives, not have other men lead their wives. Wives are to submit to their own husbands, not the husband

of another woman. In no event does Scripture say a husband should step aside and let a pastor or anyone else tell his wife directly what to do without going through him.

- See the Wikipedia article on hand kissing, excerpted here: "[Eastern] Orthodox Christians kiss their priest's hands not only to honor their spiritual father confessor, but in veneration of the Body of Christ which the priest handles during the Divine Liturgy as he prepares Holy Communion. The profound bow is frequently omitted. A similar ritual occurs when an Orthodox Christian approaches an icon he wishes to venerate. First the Christian makes a profound bow and makes the sign of the cross twice. Then he approaches the icon more closely, kissing the icon, usually on the representation of Christ's feet or the saint's hand. Lastly, he will make a final profound bow and make the sign of the cross. Orthodox theology teaches that, honor given to the Virgin Mary, ascends to him who was enfleshed by her. This applies to saint's relics or icons and in this case, to the priest's hand."
- On GFA's unlinked page, [www.gfa.org/believerschurch](http://www.gfa.org/believerschurch), they say "No matter what title we use, no man should take the place of God and His authority in our lives." Yet K.P. claims to speak for God and have absolute authority over his staff, equating submission to him to submission to God.
- There does not seem to be much real accountability at GFA. The message is consistently submit to your leader. But to whom is Brother K.P. truly accountable? We know that there is a board, but the board knows little of the day to day workings of the Dallas office, and is stacked heavily with K.P.'s immediate family. Biblically, we believe that all believers are to submit to one another and we are told to exhort one another daily while it is called today lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. We are concerned that it does not seem that Brother K.P. is truly submitted to any church or group of men with whom he has regular contact. Overall, we believe Brother K.P. is a godly man, but we are all in a very dangerous place when we place ourselves outside and above the body.
- Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves," is addressed to those submitting, not to the leader. We are commanded to be submissive, but submission is conferred, not usurped. Leaders are servants and Paul says in 1 Cor. 16:15 that those who "have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints" are the very ones the saints obey. There is nothing more natural than following the leadership of the good, as evidenced by the patient submitting to the physician. But biblical authority is limited by the commandments of Scripture. Our spiritual leaders have no authority over us beyond what the Bible demands, and if they demand anything not commanded in Scripture, we are free to respectfully decline. For example, the Bible demands that we be faithful employees - so we submit to ordinary workplace requests. We also are to submit to church discipline issues where a local church is involved. But the Bible does not say Christian leaders can tell us where to live, how long to stay, what our call from God is, whom to marry or when, what house to buy, how many kids to have, etc. God, not man, decides the parameters of authority.
- In no event does Scripture allow for a leader to "own" someone with authority over their personal decisions. Leaders are not to exercise authority, giving orders as though it were a

military organization with the leader as the commander. Even if someone believes they are called to serve a ministry for life, that kind of submission is voluntary, not compulsory.

- The Bible says that even when prophets speak in a meeting, "the others must judge" (1 Cor.14:29) This means we are instructed not to accept everything a leader teaches without checking it out. K.P. and GFA leaders explicitly discourage their staff from checking what K.P. says through prayer and Bible study, saying they do not need to check and see whether it is scriptural or if they should follow it, but should unquestioningly accept it.

## **2. GFA leadership prioritizes ministry over family, and teaches the same.**

GFA leadership teaches (or strongly implies) that your calling in ministry profession is more important than your calling to lead your family well. At GFA there's a strong teaching that if your family or spouse is having issues, you should "give those to the Lord" or send the spouse to talk to someone on a pre-approved list of staff that are "safe" to talk to (meaning they'll coach them to just "stay in the battle".) You're instructed to not let that get in the way of your ministry, as opposed to dealing with your family issues first and foremost so that you can be effective in ministry and honor the Lord. This was made evident through many teachings, including frequent uplifting of men in history who left their wives or deserted their families for ministry, as well as the counsel some staff received regarding their spouses. Participation in any outside Bible studies and even within staff has usually been prohibited, making it difficult for staff to work through or recognize they're not alone in these issues.

- So important is taking care of one's family to God, that Paul says a man is disqualified from the work of the ministry if his family is not in good order: "If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" "Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well." (1 Tim. 3)
- Many men, upon hearing GFA's constant teachings to give up everything to serve God (usually implied as working at the office, even though caring for family at home is also serving God), have ignored their wives' requests for help and assumed they're just not spiritual enough and need to learn to endure this needless suffering. But God instructs men to "love their wives as their own bodies." (Eph 5:28) A man with a wife who is ailing spiritually or is separated from him emotionally has a sick marriage in need of attention, and never has any excuse to leave her or delay in doing whatever it takes to repair his marriage.
- Biblically speaking, we are free to change our vocation as we feel led, but a husband's call is always first and foremost to his wife and family. GFA leaders may agree to this point but in practice they seem to have it reversed. GFA leaders often point to the verse about being willing to forsake all, even family, to follow Jesus, but this verse refers to our faithfulness to Jesus even amidst persecution from our own family, not faithfulness to a certain organization, church or vocation at the expense of one's own wife and children.

- GFA emphasizes certain Scriptures that speak of forsaking all to follow Jesus. These are true and good, and we affirm them. But GFA almost entirely ignores any Scriptures that speak of the responsibility we have to our families. From Scripture, I do not know it is God's will that I work 50 hours a week at GFA, but I do know I need to lay down my life for my wife and raise godly children. To emphasize one truth while neglecting the other is a false teaching. (We would also say it is a false teaching to focus on your own family and neglect the Great Commission.) We need to deal honestly with all the Scriptures, not pick and choose the ones which most benefit us.

### **3. GFA leaders lie or intentionally deceive people in order to "protect" the ministry.**

GFA leadership believes that lying to the staff and others is justifiable if it protects the ministry or its leaders. A number of instances have occurred where leadership lied to the staff about how or why someone left. Leadership has on multiple occasions announced to the staff that someone "chose to move on" or "felt God calling them elsewhere" when in actuality they were fired or asked to leave. In every case, the staff member in question chose not to speak up about it for fear of being labeled negatively.

Due to the testimony of a number of witnesses, and our own experience while on staff: we suspect, but have no actual knowledge, that certain field operations, such as how donations are distributed, are not at all as represented to the staff or donors. For example, pictures of donated items such as church buildings have been sent to donors, saying that they are the actual photo of what they donated, but some of us heard from people working in the ministry partners department that the same photo was re-used for many donors. Another example is that Bicycles and Jesus Wells are such a popular donation item that the ministry continues to promote them even though they have already received so much money toward them that we suspect they've already gone far beyond meeting the need. If this is true, donors giving toward these items aren't actually meeting a real need even though it is falsely presented to them as a real and present need in order to keep the money flowing in. And again, some of us heard from a woman who used to sponsor hundreds of children from diverse regions, that all of the Bridge of Hope letters coming to her had the same original-language Hindi handwriting style - but the letters are represented as having been written by the actual children.

GFA is not transparent about the extent to which they have become an episcopal organization that practices episcopal traditions, especially on the field, but increasingly at home offices as well, such as in ordination ceremonies conducted by K.P. Often times, staff and students have already raised funds and dramatically altered their lives before they learn this, and have little choice but to stick out their commitment. If you google "episcopal site:gfa.org" you'll see that the only page even mentioning the word is a "hidden" (un-linked, un-advertised) page [www.gfa.org/believerschurch](http://www.gfa.org/believerschurch). GFA has a responsibility to be transparent about their denomination affiliation and practices, as these are key

components of a Christian missionary organization's operation and key considerations for donors and potential staff.

- Telling a lie does not necessarily mean saying something that is demonstrably false. God killed Ananias when there is no record that he ever opened his mouth. He merely gave a false impression of what was going on.
- "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight." (Pr 12:22)
- "Do not lie to one another." (Col 3:9)
- "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." (Eph 4:25)

#### **4. GFA practices unbiblical shunning**

In a number of cases, and for various reasons including not wearing head coverings or submitting to other extra-biblical requests from leaders, a small number of staff wives have been "shunned" — permanently prohibited from having any fellowship with the staff, including office work, attending prayer meetings or inviting staff over to their homes. This is not a result of biblical church discipline or disfellowshipping (where repentance and restoration are always the goal), but an arbitrary decision imposed by the ministry leaders with no known opportunity for restoration. In a typical ministry, the problem at hand would be resolved or else the staff couple would be fired. Yet in these cases only the wife was shunned, while the husband was told to keep working at the ministry.

GFA also strongly discourages, and sometimes expressly prohibits, staff members from fellowshiping or associating with ex-staff. This has even gone to the extent of refusing to allow staff members to minister to ex-staff families who were in dire circumstances such as death or divorce.

- Shunning of this kind has no scriptural support whatsoever, and is sinful because it tears apart the Body of Christ and goes directly against the command to be in unity and fellowship with one another. It has a devastating effect on the person and their family, making them constantly wonder what they've done wrong and if they've fallen out of favor with God. It also leaves them completely alone to deal with this challenge as all the staff who were like family to them suddenly are cut off. It also promotes fear among others in the group about whether they'll be similarly shunned, which can be used to manipulate them.
- The only kind of shunning that is biblically acceptable is a last resort in church discipline situations where someone is in flagrant, unrepentant sin, and only after repeated attempts to approach them about it with no success. Even then, an offer must always be extended to them that if they repent, they will be restored to fellowship. It is extremely questionable whether GFA's home offices, which are not churches, could even carry out biblical church discipline.

- One must wonder why GFA leaders are so insistent that staff never speak to anyone who has left. Likewise, one must wonder how many ex-staff references leadership can provide that still recommend that others join staff there.
- It should be noted that shunning is a common practice of the Amish, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

## **5. GFA prohibits or discourages staff involvement in bible studies, small groups and local churches**

GFA generally prohibits wives from attending any outside bible studies, and generally prohibits staff from conducting any regular small group bible studies or fellowship activities at their homes. All staff must seek the permission of GFA leadership to conduct any regular meetings at their homes, and are usually denied the request or told that it's a bad idea and can promote negativity and gossip. GFA also actively discourages staff from being a part of a local church.

- According to God's Word, believers are to be in a local church and in regular, close fellowship with one another. To prohibit this goes directly against the commands of scripture for believers not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together... but exhorting one another." (Heb. 10:25)
- Hearing weekly messages about the need to "stay in the battle" is not the same as studying the Scriptures and being transformed by the Word of God. Large group prayer meetings cannot replace small group fellowship where people feel more free to share their personal questions and struggles.
- We are extremely concerned that on many occasions staff have been told not to attend Bible studies nor to discuss the Scriptures among themselves. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

## **Damages of the above sins**

Specific examples of this damage include (many names and details can be provided upon request):

- Multiple couples who have divorced because of a husband faithfully following GFA leadership and neglecting his wife instead of following the Scripture and loving and laying down his life for his wife.
- Many, many couples who did not divorce, but took years to recover or are still recovering trust due to the husband not having stood up for his wife strongly enough to protect her from these policies and teachings.
- Multiple men and women spiritually "shipwrecked" who have walked away from God and who directly attribute that to their experience at GFA.

- Men, women and couples who took years to recover from spiritual abuse and regain a proper perspective on role, calling and authority (google "spiritual abuse"; it has many similarities to what goes on at GFA).
- Staff who were financially "shipwrecked" after being fired unethically and with no warning. Some were fired after incurring high medical bills, but this certainly doesn't seem like a reason to fire someone. Others were fired after questioning leadership about how their teaching and practices align with Scripture. Paul commended the Bereans for searching the Scriptures and checking out his teaching against Scripture. But at GFA, this can get you fired.
- Former and current staff questioning their ability to hear God's voice, as they're so conditioned to hear through K.P. and follow unquestioningly.
- And finally, numerous current staff who are starved for close fellowship and deep study of the Scriptures; who are prohibited from attending Bible studies, classes or regular home fellowships; and whose primary teaching from GFA revolves mostly around "staying in the battle," or in other words, staying heads-down and devoting all to office work at GFA. In fact some people, while still on staff, have been prohibited from having any house guests or fellowship with other GFA staff after leadership decided that they were not "safe."

Since many of us have approached leadership about these issues individually, with no effect, we feel obligated to take the next step as prescribed by Mt. 18, which is to approach with multiple witnesses. Our heart is that GFA would see these errors and bring correction to them. We love our brothers and sisters at GFA, and we long for things to be right concerning these major issues. We cannot sit by in good conscience while more staff each year continue to be damaged by these sins, and that is why we bring this before the leadership and board of directors.

## **Resolution**

We will expect a written response from GFA leadership within 21 days, to this address:

[address removed from this version]

To be considered resolved, the response must be on GFA letterhead and be signed by K.P. Yohannan and Daniel P. It must acknowledge, specifically apologize for, and describe how GFA will remedy these issues in the US as well as all other offices.

Or, to move the process forward in a proper manner, the aforementioned written response could outline reasons GFA feels there is a misunderstanding, as that would allow us to follow up appropriately. We have local pastors available to mediate a discussion, if that is desired.

In addition to a written, open apology and request for forgiveness, other remedies may include:



- The board may consider drafting an exit interview document and requiring it to be signed by GFA leadership and any staff member(s) who leave or are fired, to document the reasons they left or were fired — this could improve accountability.
- A staff meeting, to which the signers of this letter are invited, where K.P. and leaders are in attendance and where each of these points is addressed one by one. This will provide accountability about the resolution and demonstrate that leadership is serious about correcting these errors.
- The board should require the ministry to be open and up front about not only their Episcopal practices, but also about their specific beliefs about spiritual authority and the degree to which staff are required to submit their personal lives to K.P.. This is only alluded to in the religious order document new staff sign. If GFA wants to be an Episcopal monastery for example, with these specific beliefs about spiritual authority and prioritization of ministry even over family, they should be up front about it with their staff and donors.
- The board should not allow GFA leaders to prohibit staff from having fellowship with ex-staff, or anyone else for that matter. The Body of Christ is not divided. They should also reinstate the shunned wives of some staff husbands to fellowship, along with a serious apology and any other appropriate remedies.
- The board might consider placing one or more people from outside of K.P.'s immediate family, and perhaps even from another ministry, as a vice president or senior leader of GFA, or an oversight committee could be appointed to see that changes are implemented.

Board members, we remind you that the Lord has entrusted you with a fiduciary duty to the staff, donors, leaders and field operations of Gospel for Asia, to see that things are done above board and with integrity. We believe your help and involvement will be an essential part of a successful, God-honoring outcome. This is a very serious matter and we expect a serious response. If no written response is received within 21 days (by July 8, 2014), we will have no choice but to assume that GFA leadership is not interested in discussing or resolving these issues.

Again, responses can be mailed to:

[address removed from this version]

We, the undersigned, truly desire restoration, healing and edification. We would not have invested the countless hours we have into this effort were that not our desire. It is our hope that board members and GFA leadership would respond in order to bring a godly resolution to these things. May it be known that even though these ongoing sins make us angry, as they should, we have freely and fully forgiven GFA leadership even as God has forgiven us. We do not harbor bitterness and anger toward them, but instead we entrust them into the hands of the Lord, desiring their repentance and restoration —

knowing full well that "The Lord will judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." May this be resolved to His glory and your joy.

In His Love,

[37 Former GFA Staff, names removed from this version]

CC: GFA US Directors and Leaders, GFA Canada Directors and Leaders, Brian M., Geoff D., JP D., Andre B., Ute M.

Encl: Appendix A - Individual Testimonies [Removed from this version]