

Summary Statement

Nine ministers and their wives gathered together in conference December 30, 2013 through January 3, 2014. The retreat focused on: the need for a proper understanding of the governance established by our Creator and our Father through the family relationship, and the need for reconciliation between the ministry and the members or flock that our Father has called.

These matters were considered prayerfully, and the following pages are the result. We conclude with a plan of action for those that are interested in a new way forward. These results will also be communicated with David Hulme, who was invited but made a choice not to participate in this conference.

We submit these pages for your prayerful consideration.

SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AND GOVERNANCE

Most of us have been part of the Church for many years. We have held various positions and undertaken various roles within the many divisions of the Body of Christ. Now, with that Body facing further fragmentation, we desperately need our Father and His Son to bring us together according to Their will. We admit our powerlessness to create that unity by our own efforts.

Today, we are presented with a spiritual path that we are open to follow—a new relationship with our Father and elder Brother where we allow Them to teach us how to govern ourselves amongst ourselves. As our Father's shepherds, we admit that we have participated in scattering the flock, because we have not governed according to the spiritual principles He has given us and about which we are informed. For this we repent before our Father and apologize to our brothers and sisters.

Today we recognize and accept the need to change past practices and to pursue the path to which our Father has led us. With the love and guidance of the true Shepherd, we commit to doing what is necessary to allow Him to give us His mind so that we can serve His flock as He intends—giving our lives in imitation of His sacrifice for all mankind (Philippians 2:7–8).

We can blame no one other than ourselves for the problems we now have. And, we cannot expect anyone to fix those problems but those of us who have participated in their creation. As we actively seek to set selfish ambition aside and develop a genuine concern for the welfare of others, we acknowledge that we have failed to follow Christ first and confess that no man among us can govern within and among His flock in His stead.

In the interest of family togetherness, we commit ourselves to the acceptance of all of our Father's beloved children. We ask that all join us in both collective and individual repentance with the assurance of our faith that our Father will honor our effort and restore us to unity.

Therefore, our primary purpose is as follows: To begin to understand and define the true nature of governance within the Family of our Father and His Son and to practice it correctly.

Specific Goals:

- To develop an understanding of how our Father intends His shepherds to nurture and feed Christ's flock in accord with the spiritual nature of governance (Ezekiel 34:1–4).
- To define a ministry of reconciliation—firstly, within the ministry itself, and secondarily, to seek reconciliation of the scattered flock—mending relationships with God and each other (2 Corinthians 5:17–20).

Goal One: To develop an understanding of how our Father intends His shepherds to nurture and feed Christ's flock in accord with the spiritual nature of governance (Ezekiel 34:1–4; John 10:1–9; 1 Peter 5:1–4).

Our Ethic

The Apostle Peter, to whom Jesus said, “tend and feed my sheep,” teaches us to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another (1 Peter 5:5). Peter’s instruction reminds us that the Father’s children belong to Him—He purchased them with the blood of His only begotten Son.

The humility we seek to practice as shepherds begins with an appreciation of the humility demonstrated in the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Son says of Himself that there is none good but the Father (Mark 10:18). The Father then bestows on His Son the honor of referring to Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). He is also referred to as the Chief or ranking Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). As the Good Shepherd, with permission from His Father, Jesus willingly lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:17–18).

The Chief Shepherd’s loving care is our model for the spiritual governance of the Father’s flock. Therefore, we see the “sheep” as those called and brought through the gate, Jesus the Christ (John 10:7); as our Father’s beloved children, we are to shepherd them as the Chief Shepherd does.

Our Responsibility

A common occupation in Israel from antiquity is shepherding. Jesus uses it as a means to illustrate the care and nurturing of His Father’s children. An experienced shepherd confirms the truth of Jesus’ description of the nature of sheep in John 10:2–5. Sheep who are forced move with great difficulty; however, they can very easily be led. They quickly learn to follow the voice of a true shepherd (John 10:3) who gathers them and walks ahead of them through the gate and into the pasture (John 10:2–3). If they do not recognize the voice of the shepherd, they will not follow but flee (John 10:5).

Our understanding of what our Father wants for His children begins when we consider His indictment against those who did not fulfill their duties as shepherds:

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them”’” (Ezekiel 34:1–6).

A shepherd is to:

- *Meet needs.* The Hebrew from which the word *feed* is translated conveys the sense of peace, grazing and watering. In general, the word is meant to convey assessing individual and group needs and supplying those needs so that the flock is safe and can thrive. The focus is on the needs of the sheep, not on the shepherds.

- *Attend to.* This means knowing each child in the family well enough to recognize when they are suffering from illness, disease, or weakness—emotional, mental and spiritual grief—and to labor to heal them, even if their suffering has been self-inflicted.
- *Protect and aid healing*—cause no harm. Our job is not to break people down or tear them apart. It is to recognize that all people are already broken. Our responsibility is to bind each individual up where they are broken and then gather them together into a flock for God's glory.
- *Gather*—to develop a family tradition of togetherness. Like the Chief Shepherd, we must not drive our Father's children away (John 6:37). We have an obligation to prevent them from straying. With respect to those who have strayed—been expelled—we must seek them out to effect reconciliation in an effort to enable them to repent before their Father.
- *Restore.* The Chief Shepherd lost none but the son of perdition (John 17:12). We must seek those whose reputation or person has been damaged or destroyed. Also, we must facilitate the resolution of family conflict by assisting family members to reconcile among themselves (Matthew 18:15–20).

Our service to our Father's flock is to humbly and eagerly lead them, calling them by name.

Goal Two: To define a ministry of reconciliation—firstly, within the ministry itself, and secondarily, to seek reconciliation of the scattered flock—mending relationships with God and each other (2 Corinthians 5:17–20).

The practice of the true nature of spiritual governance demands reconciliation. The basis of governance in a ministry of reconciliation must involve a body of people who are unified with the God family and each other. Godly governance must flow from this family model. We accept the need for reconciliation between parties with whom problems already exist to build a stronger family relationship. From this foundation the nature of true Godly governance can develop.

Reconciliation begins with our being reconciled to the Father through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18). This is a one-way movement on our part towards the Father. It requires the process of repentance, which itself is a gift from the Father to His children (Romans 2:4). This allows us to come into a covenant relationship with the God family.

On the human level, reconciliation is a two-way process (Matthew 5:23–24). A repentant attitude on behalf of two people removes the natural human barrier to submitting to one another, drawing people together in a mutual family relationship with the Father (Ephesians 5:21).

Christ characterized this as the role of peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). Peace is the result of reconciliation between us. Peace in the Bible is based on the concept of *shalom*—well-being and completeness, not the absence of conflict or disagreement as it is understood in the world today. It is an active condition, not passive. It involves our attitude and action toward a brother or sister. The end result of being a peacemaker is to be called a child or son of God: the result we all seek.

Reconciling is a heavy responsibility, whether with our Father or others. Paul's use of the expression "ministry of reconciliation" may be better rendered as the "task of reconciliation." It is part of the process of "building up," in which Jude challenges us to be involved (Romans 14:19; Jude 20). We must rededicate ourselves to reconciliation so that the flock can be fed and the gospel can be preached. This dedication must be based on the marriage/family model of the nurturing, caring use of authority as our Father has revealed.

We believe this is an effort worthy of all who consider themselves children of God. Has the Father called you to achieve this goal?

Dear brothers and sisters,

As we continue our first steps to understand and define the true nature of the governance of our Father and His Son within Their Family and to practice it correctly, we have cautiously decided to:

1. Form an advisory council of those present to assess and meet the needs of God's spiritual family during this initial period.
2. Provide weekly Sabbath services (beginning this coming Sabbath, January 4, 2014) and Friday night Bible studies (beginning next week, January 10, 2014) for those desiring them, via Zoom conferencing (visit www.thefatherscall.org for more information).
3. Schedule a post-conference recap meeting and Q&A for deacons and elders.
4. Invite those who desire God's guidance and direction at this time to collectively fast on behalf of all of God's people, at a time yet to be determined.
5. Provide a transitional Web site—www.thefatherscall.org—to supply information and recorded messages.

In the spirit of developing a greater understanding of how our Father intends His shepherds to nurture and feed Christ's flock in accord with the spiritual nature of governance, we recognize the importance of calmly and patiently moving forward, as Christ leads us all.

We feel that this conference has enabled us to reconcile with each other with a greater view to the reconciliation of all of God's people to our Father and to each other. These feelings are echoed in the selected comments of those present.

Sincerely,

Those Present:

Bill Hutchison

Bob Rodzaj

Brian Orchard

Cliff Veal

Marshall Stiver

Peter Nathan

Stephen Elliott

Steve Andrews

Ted Budge

"After some initial skepticism, the experience of participating in a conference based on submitting one to another and seeing the positive working of the Holy Spirit was truly inspiring. Great encouragement for moving the work of God forward."
(Brian Orchard)

"It was so refreshing to have our lovely wives with us. Their presence and their active participation added a welcome and beneficial element." (Cliff Veal)

"It has been very encouraging to address issues that speak to the needs of the greater family of God, with the intent of understanding and providing a potential way to draw all of our Father's children together." (Bob Rodzaj)

"What a great conference! We came together to take a fresh look at our responsibilities. Hard work, and great fun." (Stephen Elliott)