

October 29, 2004

Rev. Betty Burger

President

Board of International Ministries

Dear Rev. Burger:

We have received a copy of your note to Dr. Marcia Patton which included a letter from your legal counsel. Marcia had requested an explanation of the process used that led into the dismissal of Rev. Hector Cortez as International Ministries executive director. Marcia's communication clearly expresses the reason for the Evergreen Region Board's request for "revelation of process", followed by two questions, "What was the process?" and "Was the process fair". (1)

Also, in his communication from the Rochester/Genesee Region, Alan Newton made a similar request relative to a meeting between the parties involved: "This meeting would be for the purpose of expressing grievances and seeking answers to questions... about the process used in terminating Rev. Cortez". (2)

These communications requested only information about process. The content of the dialogues taken place at the executive committee and board meetings could be declared "confidential" under some circumstances. Regarding the issue of Rev. Cortez' dismissal, "process" doesn't seem to fit under legal categorization, specifically when you have stated that you are "...confident that legally, ecclesiastically, theologically and Biblically the process has been solid. Furthermore, in your recent report to your region, you went even further with the expression "a just and Christ-honoring process". Why then your refusal to come to the table and share that process? Anything so solid, just and Christ-honoring, is to be proclaimed, and let the blessed name of our Lord be magnified and praised. Isn't this what is behind International Ministries mission around the world? If it cannot be shared, is it solid, just, and Christ-honoring?

Your refusal to agree to enter into dialogue with the parties involved is increasing their suspicion of wrongdoing from your part. Although we agree that the Board of International Ministries, including its executive committee, is composed of "persons of integrity", as expressed by the GEC communication of June 28. However, persons of integrity participate in our fallen nature, and at times act accordingly. That is, it is possible for persons of integrity to commit grave errors. As a family of American Baptists it is important that we deal with our errors, grievances and relationships by holding each other accountable. By dealing with them face to face, confidants that through our faith, our values, our theology, our wisdom, our sense of family, and by upholding our covenants, we can reach common understanding. This is where we acknowledge our wrong doing, ask forgiveness if necessary, restore that which is possible, and start all over anew. In our particular case, we can then, and not before, "put these employment issues behind us, begin to build the fractured relationships throughout ABC-USA, and move forward with the world wide mission of International Ministries" and the whole denomination.

I must correct your legal counsel's statement that we are dealing with "employment issues". While this is true in part, we are also dealing with the potential justice issues of denying due process; an injustice done to one of our leaders; actions on the part of International Ministries executive committee and board actions which have harmed the reputation of our denomination in the eyes of many; the shattered relationships that these actions have created; and a loss of dignity of who we are as a people of God.

So we hope we can enter into such level of conversation and understanding and agree on creating again a healthy and trusted organization.

Sincerely,

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