

“the church in Toronto”

A Clarifying Word concerning “the church in Toronto”

According to the New Testament, a local church has an “organizational” side, with elders, deacons and the practical assembling of the saints, and an essential and organic side, with Christ as its content and reality to be the local expression of the universal Body of Christ (see Witness Lee, *Elders’ Management of the Church*, p. 223).

Apart from these two biblical aspects of a local church and to meet Canadian financial regulations (Rom. 13:1) the members of a local church may form a corporation and elect Directors who serve as *trustees* to hold the church’s assets *in trust*. It is elementary to understand that such a corporation is not “the church.” It is critical that the Directors of the corporation, even if they also serve as elders in the church, do not use their position *as Directors* to seek influence in the local church.

Thus, “The Church of the Torontonians” and its Directors exist to serve the interests of “the church in Toronto” and to satisfy the requirements of the laws of Canada on the church’s behalf. The Directors of The Church of the Torontonians must not attempt to govern “the church in Toronto” in any way, organizationally or essentially, since to do so would violate the heavenly nature and the divine government of the church in Toronto revealed in the New Testament.

Today the heavenly nature, divine government and biblical standing of the local church in Toronto is suffering great violence by the actions and proposals of Directors of “The Church of the Torontonians” corporation, Jonathan P’ng and Steve Prichard, and some of the other elders.

Steps to Usurp the Corporation & Damage the Church

Step 1—Violating the By-laws: Two Directors of The Church of the Torontonians have insisted on scheduling the business meeting early this year, even before the financial statements have been audited. Last month, in violation of our corporate By-laws, they revised the membership application requirements. A revision to the By-laws such as this requires the pre-approval of two-thirds of the members. But the two Directors could not win a two-thirds vote without more supporters. So, two weeks ago, insisting on using their new membership criteria, they denied voting membership to the applications of many qualified saints while approving their own supporters.

Step 2—Stacking the Vote: The first order of business on the March 4th Agenda is a vote “approving” their new membership criteria. By this sleight of hand they hope to circumvent the requirement to amend the By-laws until *after* they have swollen the voting rolls with supporters. After this vote, they hope to gain your approval of their pre-selected list of new voters.

Step 3—Completing the Takeover: Once the voting rolls are swollen with new members, the Agenda moves forward quickly to:

- validate the 2006 Financial Statements—which are not audited and are therefore unreliable,
- re-elect themselves and one new director—not David Wang, who was unilaterally removed from the ballot, and, as the coup de grâce,
- approve new By-laws (see below), completing The Church of the Torontonians’ takeover of what was “the church in Toronto.”

One Director, David Wang, has consistently opposed these maneuverings, but he has also consistently been over-ruled by Steve Prichard and Jonathan P’ng. Politicians could not have done a better job of stealing an election.

New By-laws Make a Mockery of “the church in Toronto”

Despite the requirement, embodied in the corporate Letters Patent, to serve the biblical model, the new by-laws methodically overthrow fundamental New Testament teachings concerning the nature and government of the church.

The proposed By-laws formalize a system of error (Eph. 4:14) in which the Directors control the church in Toronto, usurp the role of the elders, and even chose the church’s apostle. The authority to discipline the saints has a significant place in this system. The new By-laws set in place an unchallengeable hierarchy of Director-elders over second-class elders, and then the rest of the church.

Following are examples from this system of error:

1. The new By-laws endorse an unscriptural procedure for the elders’ decision-making—ruling by majority vote (1.1.12). This fleshly and worldly alternative to knowing the cross and the authority of the Head by being blended together through prayer and fellowship utterly negates God’s government in the church.
2. The By-laws give the Directors power to “suspend” an elder indefinitely, without notice and without recourse (9.10). They can overrule the decisions of the elders (5.10). According to the Bible, and contrary to the new By-laws (13.2), the elders are subject to the apostles (1 Tim. 1:9).
3. The new By-laws replace the New Testament definition of apostles with an unbiblical view of a church choosing its own special apostle. Under the By-laws, those elders who are not suspended by the directors decide who will be the church in Toronto’s apostle(s) (10.2). This is against the truth. Apostles are appointed by God for ministry to the universal church; there is no scriptural basis for a locality to have its own apostle(s). The New Testament sanctions no special relationship between a church and a particular apostle

and, in fact, condemns such a relationship (1 Cor. 1:12-13; 3:22 “all are yours”). “Their ministry is universal for all the churches” (Witness Lee).

4. The Directors are empowered to remove anyone who disagrees with them (4.13.3-6) and impose disciplinary measures (13.5.5).
5. The Directors approve the voters (4.4) and can add ten more votes by granting others honorary voting member status (4.9).
6. The Directors can be removed only by a two-thirds vote at a business meeting (5.6), however a business meeting can be called only by the Board of Directors itself (8.2).

The scope of both the Directors’ and the elders’ powers in the proposed new By-laws far exceed what is legally required and scripturally allowed. In addition, the new by-laws also contain many loopholes inviting further abuse:

1. Some of the new membership requirements are intrusive and contrary to scriptural principles, e.g. the Board tracks financial contributions (4.1.9), so giving can no longer be in secret (see Matt 6:1-4; Life-study of Matthew, p. 263). It is inappropriate to monitor saints’ personal giving.
2. The Board can change the requirements for voting members (4.1.12), allowing it to include / exclude groups of members at will.
3. The Board can refuse membership to anyone who disagrees with them by labeling them as “contentious” (4.1.11). This By-law appears to misapply 1 Corinthians 11:16, which refers to not being contentious about the universal practice of the churches in following the apostles’ teaching.
4. The new by-laws give only subjective and ill-defined grounds for depriving members of their vote (4.13.3 through 4.13.5), giving the Board carte blanche to strip members of their voting rights if they disagree with the dominant members of the Board.
5. Under 13.4 and 13.5 all members waive all rights and agree to obey (not just submit) to the authority and discipline of the elders and Directors. This is a condition of being a voting member.
6. According to 13.4.8(e) and 13.4.9, the By-laws allow members to be excluded from the meetings of “the church in Toronto.”

About the Proposed Slate of Directors

Re-electing the two Directors who planned this takeover is of concern to us because:

- They have insincerely manipulated both the membership approval process and the annual business meeting for their own ends.

- They proposed new By-laws granting themselves extensive and unbiblical powers, while telling the saints the By-laws just needed to be brought up-to-date.
- They removed Ron MacVicar as Secretary of the Board without cause. He was only told that his continued service was “not in the best interests of the corporation.” This sounds ominously like the provisions put forth in the proposed by-laws that allow Directors to revoke members’ voting rights for “activities against the best interests of the Church.”
- Then, within days they removed David Wang from being President of the Board, a position he held for 14 years, again without cause.

All of these actions are designed to eliminate from positions of responsibility those who disagree with the direction which some Directors are seeking to impose upon the church. They want: (1) the right, contrary to Romans 14, to remove from the church any member with whom they disagree and (2) the ability, contrary to Rev. 2-3, to completely separate the church in Toronto from the common fellowship of all of the local churches in the one Body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:9), thus making the so-called “church” over which they would preside a local sect.

An Appeal to be Faithful to “the church in Toronto”

As believers in Christ, we generally seek to avoid appeals to secular authority to resolve disputes. However, there are cases where to protect our legitimate rights we should be bold to do so (see Acts 16:37-38; 22:25; 25:10-12; and *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 59, p. 239). In this case, such an appeal is required because two Directors are circumventing the by-laws and flooding the voting rolls with those whom they believe will vote for them. Romans 13:1 should be applied to the Directors in this case. Because they have refused our pleas (Matt. 18) and demonstrated that they will not follow lawful means, we are forced to appeal to the Court.

Our appeal asks the Court to instruct the Board of Directors to do nothing more than to follow the procedures required in our corporate by-laws. It is simply an attempt to ensure that a fair process is followed in admitting new members and to preclude them from packing the membership roll with voters not qualified under the current by-laws and from disqualifying members who are qualified.

Our appeal is an attempt to allow the legitimate membership of the church to hold a fair business meeting.

Your brothers standing for the church in Toronto,

David Wang

Ron MacVicar