

Membership Notes, March 31, 2014

[PLEASE NOTE: Most Scriptures quoted below are from a delightful new Bible translation, [The Voice](#).]

Introduction

*For I tell you, that **unless your justice abound** more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)*

“Justice/righteousness” is invariably a biblical relational term. Restorative Justice theologian Christopher Marshall explains:

In biblical usage, righteousness and justice have closely related, often identical, meanings. The basic idea behind the biblical notion of righteousness is ‘doing what is right’, living in a condition of ‘all-rightness’, maintaining right relationships, both with God and with other members of the community. To be righteous is to do justice, that is, to bring about harmony and well-being in *all* one’s relationships, both individual and communal, and especially by defending the oppressed. Righteousness and justice are relational categories before they are moral or legal ones. So when the biblical writers ascribe righteousness to God (as Paul does in Romans), they are referring primarily to God’s faithfulness in his relationships with people, and to God’s actions in the world to secure justice for the oppressed. The righteousness of God is essentially the saving action of a faithful, covenant-keeping God on behalf of those in need (“Paul and Christian Social Responsibility”, *Anvil*, Volume 17, No 1, 2000).

Since June 2010, the Board in my experience repeatedly eschewed at least aspects of this kind of “justice”.

I raised three initial concerns in the notice I first sent to membership (March 30, 2014 by electronic *MailChimp* ([Executive Director’s Official Last Message to membership](#), also on the website page), March 31, 2014 by regular mail). As stated in the e-mail to the membership: I cannot fathom how these issues can be rejected and the agency continue to be known as “Restorative Christian Ministries”. I add two more below.

I said I believe the membership should hold the Board accountable to:

- fully affirm the agency’s core values by following the guidance of the Board Manual;
- **initiate** a process of **full** reconciliation of all conflict issues, through re-engaging the services of mediator Alan Simpson;
- retract the “libel” fully.

In my estimation: By leadership rejection of the agency core values in the Board Manual, and by rejection of initiating a process of full reconciliation, M2/W2 Association, even if it “survives” *forfeits any continuing right to do ministry*, which is predicated on the core values of relationship building, cooperation, collaboration, consensus decision-making, reconciliation.

I assign a number below to each of the five outstanding issues I raise in this fuller account.

Interjection

I have felt great joy since my last day of work February 6, 2014 before holidays, and eventual retirement March 31, 2014! If this is what retirement continues to promise, I'm absolutely delighted, hugely grateful, and recommend it to everyone! I write to members out of a place of personal elation and gratitude.

My dominant emotion about what I share below however is: *sadness*. *It could have been so different!* I love the Gospel mandate of this ministry.

Why Raise This Sad Story of Injustice?

I am raising deep concerns about my perception of unjust agency governance in relation to the kind of New Testament justice found in Matthew 5:20. That's why I have been urging the Board constantly to work out these issues with Staff and me through a mediator. An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) held April 17, 2014 was not that forum. If mediator Alan Simpson is consulted, I believe he will indicate the same. Such a process needs the safety of a third-party mediator; and many hours of hard mediation work in a variety of contexts. I will say more about the EGM at the end.

I likewise raised agency alarms at the November 14, 2013 Annual General Meeting. A copy of the [Vision, November 14, 2013](#) document presented then is included on this website page. On that occasion, there was no membership response. But less than a third of membership attended. It is my obligation to inform the membership.

I do the following again reluctantly, as unpleasant obligation. I wish I did not feel such responsibility. I would rather be a Jonah; in this case wash my hands and walk away. I feel necessity of faithfulness to speak out on behalf of justice for the entire agency, for all Staff, for all we serve, for all our partners, colleagues, etc., and for me in future ministry.

Ephesians 4:26 encourages: "*When you are angry, don't let it carry you into sin... (The Voice)*" Jesus was angry at the death of his friend Lazarus; at the Pharisees and the Sadducees repeatedly; at the Temple moneychangers; etc. I have felt recurring "anger" over the years at Board "lording it over" injustices: I trust (in the end) *without sin*. But who can judge except God; especially when Jesus says: "*Do not judge [condemn] ... (Matthew 7:1)*."? (I should hedge in this instance with "*without 'too much imperfection' rather than 'sin'*").

I know this: I bear no ill-will towards anyone on the Board. I wish instead Board members well, and for full reconciliation with each. (See more below.) I am however concerned about experiences of Board "lording it over" injustices and consequent M2/W2 mismanagement in relation to core values. However one interprets the opening verses of Romans 13, "lording it over" injustices are not endorsed regardless.

There is a Latin expression: *Caveat lector* – Let the reader beware. I'd slightly change it: *Let the reader act appropriately*.

This is a further attempt at moral suasion to the membership in alarm-raising about the agency. I am trying to balance obligation and integrity with love of neighbour/enemy for the current agency leadership. I am trying to follow this injunction: “*Instead, by truth spoken in love, we are to grow in every way into him – the Anointed One, the Head* (Ephesians 4:15 – *The Voice*).” I am attempting the delicate task of speaking truth in love.

A Tragic Story of Injustice

In recounting the following tragic story, there is a rational and an emotional part. *I am (my wife in part too) subject of this story!* It is a story of repeated experiences of “lording it over” injustice at the hands of the Board. I am trying to balance “disinterested description” from my experience, with indication of how it has “felt”. I am so open to be questioned and challenged by membership on anything below. Again: I believe that the best response to what I am raising is a full process of reconciliation. Anything less will likely deteriorate at best to “he said/she said”, at worst to... One can guess.

At the April 17, 2014 EGM, my experience from the contractor was of that sort. The EGM was no forum for respectful dialogue; was experienced by me as disrespectful diatribe. In the very structure of the event, there was no opportunity given, even if it had been an appropriate forum, for response. The EGM was contrary to any norms of Restorative Justice procedure; procedure that profoundly respects and encourages all voices equally. Sadly, the contractor who most touted herself as a Restorative Justice “expert” most abjectly displayed disparagement of its most core tenet: empowerment of all parties to engage on a level playing field. More on this below.

The contractor has also steadfastly refused to engage in mediation with me. The most recent refusal was my invitation again to her at the April 17, 2014 EGM to meet with me through a mediator. In a Board meeting forum, November 25, 2013, and again at the EGM (Esther too at this meeting), I was subjected to numerous public criticisms by her. I am asking for a mediated process in which to respond to those criticisms: one that offers a level playing-field, not one where Board or EGM Chairs, as was our/my experience, permit her to project many unanswered one-sided accusations against us/me in a “power over” forum.

We all can reflect on experiences of injustice. We grow from such experiences when we forgive, even when there is no acknowledgement of wrong-doing or repentance, amends-making, or promise to harm no more – as in this case. *Forgiveness* as I understand is *letting go*: what spiritual director [Richard Rohr](#) says is of the essence in spiritual development. Like cutting the strings of a puppeteer, this means that the experiences and the perpetrators *lose control* of the victim. The victim also stops that control by the forgiving act. (However, for the Gospel circuit of forgiveness to complete, there must be confession, repentance, amends-making and commitment to sin no more by the offending party/ies. This is the heart of the biblical doctrines of justification and sanctification.) Alan Simpson has added in the past: all parties must confess to wrongdoing. A mediation process facilitates that. A “power over” process creates “winners” and “losers”, not reconciliation and restored relationships.

I can only do the psychological part of forgiveness for my experience of the Board’s “lording it over” injustices, whereby I am personally freed from control over me of those repeated unjust

acts. The Board must do its part, else there can be no moving forward, no ministry credibility. There is instead “cheap grace”, not true repentance, embraced. See further below.

When one “forgives” in this way, the victimization is not altered; only the capacity of the wrongdoer to do further harm is neutralized by the victim’s forgiving act. In that way, I have “forgiven” the leadership as individuals. I bear individual Board members no ill-will, wish them no harm – wish them God’s mercy and grace. *People can change!* Not they but their unjust actions are at issue in my experience of their rejecting M2/W2’s core values. (This perspective is core also to our work with all offenders in this agency: “God hates the sin but loves the sinner.”, is the saying.) This also means *I the complainant here, must be open to change, to confess my wrongdoing* in any mediation process. Several times now, some Board members and the contractor have told me I “did (several) wrong(s)” and must apologize. If I do not believe I have done a wrong(s), “apology” is a sham. I can only apologize for wrong(s) I believe I have done. No “force” can elicit apology, except that of persuasion. That is one way to understand God’s entire history with humanity generally, with each person specifically.

For example: in my supervisory role of the contractor, I initiated an accountability “process”: I actually empowered her to name the “process” (saying unless I felt it unjust I would accept it)! The contractor has ever since strongly objected to being held accountable. What could have been a teachable moment for her dissipated with Board backing. In a mediation session I would suggest that this kind of accountability-holding by me could have proved instructive for her; that it was at minimum my prerogative as her supervisor. We all resist accountability at times in our lives, as we resist taking unsavoury medicine. Accountability-holding is not bad in itself though. In a mediation session, I genuinely believe the contractor and I could work out the issues at play.

I say straightforwardly: In every aspect of my dealing with the contractor, I believe I “did no wrong”. No amount of judging and accusations given by Board members or by the contractor has so far changed my opinion. In a mediation process, where there is equal power and opportunity to ask and respond to clarifying questions, I *might* actually see where/if I have done wrong! It is possible that the contractor might also agree that after all, I did not intend or do wrong, that I at least took steps to mitigate impact on her.

It is ubiquitous workplace phenomenon that supervised Staff resist supervisory initiatives. It’s the human condition in fact. That the contractor resisted my supervisory role is nothing new. That she resists all invitations to mediation is problematic to be sure. That she repeatedly has claimed the reason is that I, her former supervisor, am not somehow a good candidate for such mediation work, is genuinely puzzling. (I have been a known mediation theorist/practitioner, and multiply published author for 40 years in the international Restorative Justice field, and recipient of the first ever national Ron Wiebe Restorative Justice award from Correctional Services Canada.) On the contrary, I think I might indeed be a candidate for such mediation work, and would love to give it a try with the contractor! So my invitation to such hard mediation work with the contractor remains a standing offer.

In an undated letter given me by the Board, received January 20, 2014, it was said I could take the “high road” and not speak out about Board “lording it over” injustice, or the “low road”. The Board wrote in part:

A disgruntled departing leader has a choice as to how they [*sic*] will move on. They can take what is often referred to as a “High Road”. They can also take a “low Road” and do serious damage to the organization they have served. It is not too late to confirm a positive legacy.

Some at the April 17, 2014 EGM said I should not have taken the action that occasioned the EGM.

A few comments in response to the letter received January 20, 2014 are:

- The letter was written (with no prior or subsequent face-to-face communication) by two new Board members, appointment of whom I had opposed, which opposition was overruled by the Board despite a Board Chairperson promise to me of “full consultation with the Executive Director” made at the November 14, 2013 AGM. Such consultation did not happen.

The two new appointees had not even talked to me personally about the issues addressed; nor had one ever met Esther, my wife, who is likewise severely critiqued by them, as you shall see. The other had met Esther once or twice briefly. Both Board members knew I had opposed their appointments, because the Board, despite promised consultation with me, had not asked them for a commitment to the Board Manual before being appointed; because the new members had not agreed to commit to a full process of reconciliation for the agency. Both were key commitments I requested for such appointments. Both were rejected. How the new appointees in good faith could have agreed to their appointments is their issue. Both have not talked with Esther and me since (until the April 17, 2014 EGM) about any aspect of the agency conflict. Such a discussion now needs a mediator. (One Board member briefly talked with us both – separately – after the EGM meeting was concluded.)

- I respond *No* to “disgruntled” (I feel great, and am passionately thrilled with life!); *yes* however to an alternative wording: “unjustly treated”.
- The “high road” for me is to “speak truth to power” and “*in love*” (Ephesians 4:15), both in response to my experience of the Board’s multi-year abuse of power, and to you the membership to whom the Board is accountable. This is in a bid to stand for justice for this agency. From such a “high road”, justice is to *thunder down like a waterfall* (Amos 5:24, *The Voice*).

I will not “let go” of this justice vision for the agency.

I *do offer* Board members forgiveness nonetheless. But their acceptance does not come “cheap”. “Let go” in this context as I understand can only be function of Board members’ confession, repentance, amends-making and full commitment “to go and sin no more.” (I speak only from my perspective. In the context of mediation, Board members may legitimately present to me what and why they believe I must similarly act.) Forgiveness is not culminated without wrongdoers’ full-cycle repentance. This necessitates the hard work and road of a process of reconciliation.

- I have no investment in doing any “damage to the agency”; I am deeply committed to justice for the agency though. I also yearn for a full process of *restorative justice and reconciliation* for the Board and Staff.

- I have no investment in any kind of “legacy” as some form of ego extension. Again: I am invested in confirming a positive legacy of justice for the agency after I leave. I have tried to maintain this kind of “justice” throughout my serving M2/W2 as Executive Director.
- In my experience, justice for this agency has been violated many times under Board leadership since June 2010. This does not mean that the Board has not “served” the agency! For starters, it has held about 30 Board Meetings to run the agency. As I have said repeatedly though: if the leadership just “moves on” in ridding itself of me, and refuses to address its “lording it over” injustices, *the agency’s legitimacy to continue its ministry mandate will rot from the top down/inside out*. But I can only be a “voice crying in the wilderness”. I can only attempt moral suasion.

Five Outstanding Issues

Issue 1: *The Board’s Rejection of its Guiding Policy: The Board Manual*

The Board passed a revised “Board Manual” January 2010, under Board Chairperson Arnie Melissen’s leadership. The Board Manual was to have been a document that captured and highlighted the M2/W2 Association’s unique ethos and core values: *fully collaborative and cooperative working relationships between Staff and Board that eschews top-down exercise of power over/“lording it over”*. It was to have guided our Staff/Board relationships indefinitely. Its adoption was an agency high point; for me a kind of career achievement.

The Board Manual was a rare accomplishment and gem for agency governance. *It was thrown out from June 2010 onwards*. The strongest recommendation made by mediator Alan Simpson, as part of the mediation agreement November 19, 2012, that Barry Neufeld and I signed together through intervention of mediator Alan Simpson ([Memorandum of Understanding](#) – available on this website) was in Agreement 6 (emphases added):

6. We are committed to using the current Board Manual as our operating policy and procedure manual until we can review the Board Manual for affirmation and adjustments. (It is the mediator’s recommendation that a review of the board manual would not take place during the current facilitated/mediated efforts or until such time as there is a demonstrated restored working relationship between board and staff based on mutual trust and good faith.)

The preamble to the M.O.U. reads:

The present MoU clarifies the general conditions and arrangements for future cooperation between the concerned parties. It is not legally binding on the parties [but ethically, surely?]. These mediated agreements describes (*sic*) the future cooperation and are acknowledged as an attempt to repair a working relationship for the sake of serving the M2W2 (*sic*) agency in a productive and Christ honoring manner. It is the recommendation of the mediator that these agreements be made available to the board for accountability and encouragement.

We, Wayne Northey and Barry Neufeld, have come together to collaborate and to make an agreement for MoU [*sic*]. The partners entering the MoU have agreed to form a collaboration and so agree to the following statements:...

In response to my reminder to the Board of the M.O.U. (see [Board Letter 2](#)), the Board communicated the following to me, received January 20, 2014 (emphasis added):

Thirdly, you have suggested the board is not involving the staff in the appointment of a new ED and quote from the memorandum of understanding. While the M.O.U. is simply what it states and not a document which is authoritative irrespective of changing circumstances and contingencies the parties need to cope with, we would also observe that your harsh criticisms are both premature and unwarranted since the board has every intention of involving the staff in such consultations prior to making any decision.

Some observations are:

- There has never been, since the M.O.U. was signed November 14, 2012, “demonstrated restored working relationship between board and staff based on mutual trust and good faith.”
- Instead of “future cooperation ... to repair a working relationship for the sake of serving the M2W2 (sic) agency in a productive and Christ honoring manner.” between Barry and me, signalling that “The partners entering the MoU have agreed to form a collaboration...”, in order “that these agreements be made available to the board for accountability and encouragement.”, my experience in the past with the Board, my understanding of the January 20, 2014 letter to me, is the rejection by the Board of any kind of “accountability and encouragement” by the Board to Barry and me to continue the “collaboration”.

I experienced the Board’s statement as casuistry: “*a quibbling or evasive way of dealing with difficult cases of duty; sophistry [employment of arguments which are intentionally deceptive]. (Oxford International Dictionary).*” The Board as I understand now rejects the validity of the signed M.O.U. I would ask for clarification in a mediation session.

- The Board’s claim to involve “staff” in decision making about a future Executive Director until now has not happened (and clearly will not include the (now) ex-Executive Director); its claim at the November 14, 2013 AGM that it would involve the current Executive Director in decision making (“full consultation” was the term used) about future Board members (see below) did not happen.

Should I not conclude that the Board’s strategy has been to wait until I am retired March 31, 2014, in order to ignore any future “staff collaboration” with me? I would appreciate the opportunity to pose this question to the Board in a mediated session. (My experience of the April 17, 2014 EGM seemed to indicate that the Board was in this way “through” with me.)

- These actions of the Board, cooperated with by the “Interim Executive Director”, appear to be the inverse of “collaboration”, a betrayal of the Board Manual, and a betrayal of agency core values. I yearn for the Board in a mediated session to indicate how I should see it otherwise.
- Do you think I have the right to ask: Why should any agreements made/signed with this Board be trusted when the leadership apparently rejects a signed M.O.U., then self-justifies? By extension, do you think I have the right to ask: Why should leadership be trusted? I would so appreciate opportunity to pose those questions to the Board in mediation.

Issue 2: The Board Persistently Rejected a Full Reconciliation Process

Mediator Alan Simpson urged the Board to engage a process of full reconciliation in his "[Pre-Mediation Assessment Report](#)" (on this website page), October/November 2012. That has not happened. Exercise of "power over" in contravention of the Board Manual and agency ethos and core values can too readily facilitate injustice. In my experience, the Board has chosen this kind of "exercise" more than once, and "once" is too much.

Alan Simpson's "**SUGGESTED PATHWAY FOR FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS (MEDIATION)**" in his 2012 Report is cited immediately below. His comments immediately prior were summed up in this concern: "The board cannot continue in the same patterns of dysfunction without causing increasing damage to the whole agency. Yet, it appears that the board is not quite ready or able to work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency." In my experience, nothing has changed since that Report was made available to the membership. Here is part of Alan Simpson's Report:

RECOMMENDATIONS

It was determined in the brief interviews and group assessment that there is a willingness to engage in a mediated process to talk about the working relationship between the Executive Director and Board members. There is also a desire on staff (*sic*) to proceed with a mediated process to talk through past issues.

However, the difficult work of collaborative conflict resolution requires an immediate large amount of time and effort. The cost of facilitating the process and the personal energy required to engage in the process is (*sic*) a great deal to ask of the participants and the agency. If the agency (including staff and board) can find a common and higher value in the process they might be able to proceed with the facilitated conversation. The good news is that all the participants in the assessment identified their common interest as a desire to see M2W2 (*sic*) continue to prosper for the sake of the inmates, volunteers and supporters. This might be your best anchor for proceeding.

Two hurdles to overcome before entering the process will be rebuilding trust and moving away from an adversarial and accusatory posture. This is the hopeful path for building a cooperative workable solution. There have been some signs of this movement in recent days.

M2W2 (*sic*) board (including the executive director) has a dilemma that requires a collective effort to solve. The board cannot continue in the same patterns of dysfunction without causing increasing damage to the whole agency. Yet, it appears that the board is not quite ready or able to work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency. Some crucial questions must be asked before proceeding with facilitated conversations:

1. What can we do to create a climate of honor and respect so that you can serve each other and the agency under your care?
2. What is my personal contribution into (*sic*) the organizational and relational dysfunctions?

3. How will we know when we are willing and able to do the hard work of collaborative conflict resolution?

There is the danger in seeking a quick fix for this current crisis due to financial restraints and the prolonged organizational dysfunction. When the board decides to move forward in a collaborative manner the following pathway might assist your agency... (The part that follows the triple dots is fully cited below.)

In the experience of Staff, the following agency management ideal has been contradicted by the Board since 2010. I was told personally that the following Board Manual ideal is “unacceptable”, “impractical”, etc. (and other words to that effect):

Governance refers to the methods and style by which the Board of Directors accomplishes its responsibilities. M2/W2 chooses to govern consistent with its formal organizational values above (I, II¹) with a servant relational model of governance. This model is based on the influence of Christ’s example of foot washing and his statements regarding the use of power and authority. We value collaborative authority, and the exercise of power and authority in a **bottom-up** manner (tree diagram, p. 9) (*M2/W2 Association – Restorative Christian Ministries Board Manual*, revised January 25, 2010, p. 30).

Issue 3: Broadcast “Libel” by Board

A further break between Staff and Board was almost destined to occur without such full Board commitment to move forward respectfully with Staff for the good of the agency; without eventual commitment to fully addressing the issues of the conflict. It did.

The occasion was the criticism directed against the Executive Director by a contractor. In the legitimate performance of my Executive Director duties, I had hired temporarily a part-time secretarial Staff person.

The contractor took strong exception to this (you may ask her and me why: please ask both or none), and verbalized it openly at a Staff meeting October 10, 2013, and again to the Board in my presence October 28, 2013. When I as her Supervisor asked the contractor for accountability about aspects of that criticism, the Board (unwisely and arbitrarily in my view) removed my supervisory role of the contractor November 25, 2013, denying all opportunity for my pursuit of addressing the issues; of holding her accountable; of my providing her with a “teachable moment”.

This matter got seriously worse: it became what I experienced as “libel”. Barry Neufeld sent in a [WorkSafeBC Claim, December 12, 2013](#) (also on this website page), of accusations against my

¹ See these values at the end of the document in APPENDIX I.

wife, Esther Northey and against me, based on testimonial by the contractor. We were not consulted by any member of the Board previously or since about the allegations. The norm when such WorkSafeBC claims are filled out is: all parties are consulted. We were astounded:

- that such claims were made in the first place by the contractor; to us they were false;
- that the Board Co-Chairs endorsed the claims without investigation/consultation in relation to Esther and to me.

The report claimed that an incident

began during a Board meeting October 28 when the worker [contractor] disagreed with the Executive Director. Since then he has escalated his attempts to force her to agree with him, culminating in a degrading personal, verbal attack by his wife against the worker in a public venue Dec 5, 2013, where the worker was representing the organization.

It further was claimed that there was

Public harassment causing emotional distress.

The document was signed by one Co-Chair. The other named on the document was the second Co-Chair. The document indicated that all Board members were contacted before the filing, so one assumes that all supported the claim.

The claim was dismissed by WorkSafeBC. There was no consequent indication of withdrawal of such a claim, or apology for having made/endorsed such a false and damaging claim by the contractor or by the Board. There was no further investigation by the Board.

In brief response: I was performing a supervisory role and did not, in that undertaking, from my perspective, “escalate attempts to force her to agree with me” about anything. Esther did not mount a “degrading personal, verbal attack” against the contractor, though she did talk with her (to use subsequent Board language as cited below) “in a manner that was private and respectful”. Esther and I yearn to have opportunity, through a professional mediator, to fully discuss these allegations with the contractor and with the entire Board.

There are at least two serious consequences to this “libel”:

1. *An immediate consequence: I was forced to work from home in my final month as Executive Director.* This is ironic in light of the Board’s advice as found on the WorkSafeBC form: “Worker [contractor] can work at home, but has been advised by the Board to reduce working hours at the office, to reduce the possibility of future harassment until the situation is resolved”.

This form, with this kind of destructive claim about me, namely “harassment” of the contractor, was sent to several Staff members and to all the Board members without investigation and consequent information done/given by the Board of (at minimum!) our response to the contractor’s allegations. Other Staff and I received a copy of the form by e-mail. Otherwise, I would possibly not have known the actual content of this kind of uninvestigated Board endorsed “guilty until proved innocent” allegation!

There has been no initiative by the contractor or by the Board to ask that all copies of any materials, and all e-mails (see below for how widely at Board initiative this information has been distributed), etc., be expunged, and that all lips be silenced. Is this not “guilty until proved innocent”?! – and with no investigative process having been set in motion after four months. Is this not “libel”? I reel again in amazement as I write this. Where is there indication of agency core values displayed by the Board in such arbitrary actions – despite all the Board Manual indicates, despite all the mediator said, despite Gospel values of love of neighbour/enemy?

The workplace and leadership ethos in our perception had consequently suddenly become toxic and unsafe because of allegations made and potential further allegations that might have been made, then endorsed by Board leadership and the entire Board; all without a shred of investigative due diligence by them. There was enormous hurt felt by Staff (again), and great consequent turmoil at the workplace in my decision not to work from the office in January. This was not how my last month of agency work was meant to have been! It eliminated personal experiences of bidding farewell. From my experience to date, it also appeared to force Staff to “take sides”, thereby stirring up conflict even further, with no process in sight through full reconciliation of addressing the renewed conflict sources. In short: it created a tumultuous mess for Staff.

2. My prospects for future ministry in the wider Christian, Restorative Justice, and Corrections communities are already compromised in ways I will never know, since the (false) story is out there, including WorkSafeBC documentation sent out by the Board. We all know: *word gets around!* This document, and two e-mails to Board and Staff by Barry Neufeld, can be endlessly and effortlessly forwarded by a click or two. Since leadership has rejected all avenues for me to have the truth come out through an investigative or a full reconciliation process, Esther and I are summarily found guilty and “executed” with absolutely no due process recourse! There is a simple word for this: (overwhelming) *injustice*.

I now plead to the membership in the name of God and in the name of justice: *please hold the Board, please hold the “Interim Executive Director”, accountable to do the right thing:*

- *to initiate a full process of reconciliation immediately according to the agency’s core values in the Board Manual;*
- *to retract fully and publicly its destructive “libel” against my wife and against me!*

Further comments:

- After 40 years of working for this agency as volunteer, Staff, Board member, Executive Director, etc., *it is tragic that I felt forced into banishment from the workplace from the New Year until holidays began February 6, 2014, and again until the day of my retirement, March 31, 2014.* This was not quite how my final month had been envisioned by me. I ask simply: *How was this remotely just or fair to me?* (There is one further disturbing turn to this story that happened to me in the office March 31, 2014. Please see below.)

- Esther remains in astonishment about the above-quoted claims against us. Why the contractor’s allegations so remote from truth? One can only speculate. I so want explanation in a mediation session.
- Since the rejection of the WorkSafeBC claims against us, claims made with full support of the Board, there has been no retraction of those claims, nor apology to us, nor has the Board done any further investigation with us.

All Staff were informed by the Board that claims of “bullying and harassment” (Barry Neufeld’s expression) had been made against us by the contractor. Was not this broadcasting unfounded, since the Board had not even investigated the claims; since the claims were only unfounded accusations; since in the end WorkSafeBC rejected them; since, had anyone asked, we would have told a very different, true story? I urgently wish opportunity to ask the Board to explain this appearance of immoral action through the services of a professional mediator.

We’re all human. The Board’s actions cast a pall of “guilty until proved innocent” on us that is very difficult to shake. I do not and did not “bully and harass”. Esther does not and did not deliver “degrading personal, verbal attacks”, or indulge in “Public harassment” of anyone. The technical name for such accusations is “libel”. What does membership do with such (to us) evil? I so wish the Board to work this through in a full reconciliation process.

And word of course gets around anyway. Why did the Board exacerbate the damage of unfounded character assassinations by broadcasting this? One can only speculate. I would ask about this in a full mediation session.

Further, indication was given to Staff, and twice in letters by the Board to us (written December 19, 2013 and received January 20, 2014), that the contractor was justified in those claims; that onus of proof was with Esther when we (were forced to have) responded that the claims were simply untrue (“If that is the case, it is up to to (*sic*) Esther to clarify her meaning and intent to Colette in a manner that is private and respectful.”²), so the

² The irony would be laughable if not so tragic. The first time Esther engaged the contractor “in a manner that [was] private and respectful” on December 5, 2013, Esther netted a WorkSafeBC complaint against her and against me, one that was rejected by WorkSafeBC. I ask: Does it look like the Board is committed to finding out the truth? I would ask this question in mediation.

Despite this, the January 20, 2014 letter from the Board contained this: “We have seen no evidence of you being bullied or harassed by [the contractor] and reject the notion that you are a victim.” But of course: bullies do not see their bullying and harassment as such; those committing “lording it over” injustices deny all such claims. In this case the WorkSafeBC claim was that very deliberate act of bullying (besides other verbal attacks against us): bullying by the contractor, endorsed and broadcast widely by the Board! As too often: victims are denied status and voice by those in power. Our only appeal is: let us have the opportunity to tell our story in a professionally mediated encounter. (*footnote continued on next page*)

Board claimed January 20, 2014 (see [Board Letter 1](#) and [Board Letter 2](#), and also on the website); that Esther was under obligation “to make amends” to the contractor (December 19, 2013). *There is a simple word for this: injustice.* (Esther has been given endless accolades by 35 years of nursing students she has taught, including by colleagues, friends, family – everyone! – that she is a paragon of respect in all her relationships. (Even her husband claims this! 😊) If asked by any member, she willingly will tell what she discussed with the contractor (“in a manner that [was] private and respectful” on her part). Is she not deserving of at least being accorded that amount of respect? We so want opportunity for this in a mediation session.

- The WorkSafeBC complaint filed by the contractor against us was rejected by WorkSafeBC. A request to the Board by Esther and Wayne Northey January 13, 2014 to see all the related documentation was also rejected. (See [Wayne to Board, January 13, 2014](#).)
- From the time the claim was made against us by the contractor, until the last Board meeting I attended (January 20, 2014), that included two letters personally addressed to me on behalf of the Board, one dated December 19, 2013, the other received January 20, 2014 no date on it (see [Board Letter 1](#), [Board Letter 2](#), also found on the website page), several accusations and judgments have been levelled against us. This is what happens when conflict is left to fester unaddressed – in this case for years. This is why I cry out for a process of justice that fully embraces mediation as a means towards reconciliation.
- I ask (quotes following from Alan Simpson as cited above too):
 - Does this Board activity in unquestioned support of the contractor in your mind constitute “creat[ing] an environment of honor and respect”?
 - Does it appear that Board members or the collective Board “agree to practicing personal peacemaking as described in the board manual” [see above quote from the Board Manual, and there are several similar notations in the Board Manual: a copy of the [Board Manual](#) is available on the website page]?
 - Does it appear that the Board is committed to “Relationship building” thus:
 - work on building trust by being trustworthy and giving trust to others
 - work on providing better communication and information sharing
 - encourage conversations that connect people not just information
 - test assumptions by asking clarifying questions (seek first to understand)
 - resist the urge to blame, point fingers or make judgments about other peoples (*sic*) intentions [The two recent letters ([Board Letter 1](#), [Board Letter 2](#)) from the Board to me contain several accusations and judgments.]
 - resist the urge to bring up the items on the wall (unless working on future changes)

I underscore: Esther is eagerly willing to meet again with the contractor: provided a professional mediator and at least one other external witness provide facilitation and safety. “*Once bitten, twice shy*” is understatement. I add as underscore: I too am willing to meet with the contractor, separately, and with the Board collectively, according to the same conditions. More on this below. *There always remains hope* (I Corinthians 13; Romans 5, Romans 15, etc.)!”

- resolve future issues quickly by using the conflict resolution policy in board manual” [NOTE: No one on the Board has shown any interest in using this outstanding conflict resolution written policy since conflict began with the Board four years ago.]
 - Does it appear by my account that I have been justly treated by the contractor and the Board? (Whatever you think, please talk to all the parties first!)
- My single answer to the above series of question is “No”. There is a simple word for this: *injustice*.
- The way forward is contained in my repeated appeal and proposal to the Board, the most recent sent January 14, 2014:

I put on record finally: I recommend that mediator Alan Simpson be re-engaged to *fully* mediate the multiple issues that obtain between Board and Staff, with a view, hope, and ultimate goal of full reconciliation. *If not undertaken, I believe that our agency loses its ethical right and compass to continue to offer the services of this ministry.*

- The Board again in its January 20, 2014 response ignored this recommendation. The Board has remained entrenched in its one-sided accusations and judgments against Esther Northey and against me. The Board *so far* appears willing to sweep all this “lording it over” injustice under the table however, rather than engage in a reconciliation process. But there remains hope!
- In an e-mail sent to all Staff and Board, dated January 10, 2014, Barry Neufeld wrote (emphasis added):

Secondly as you may be aware, a complaint was forwarded to WorkSafeBC by a medical Professional [a chiropractor] attending to our contractor [...] WorkSafeBC makes this mandatory, and employers are not to discourage employees or contractors or their attending medical professionals from filing a complaint. WorkSafeBC has investigated the complaint and recently decided that Ms. Squires’ contract does not cover her for injuries related to work. Therefore, we may deal with the matter internally. According to our new procedure, it will be dealt with by the Chair of our personnel committee, Mr. Darrel Schultz.

In a Board letter received by me January 20, 2014, it was stated, in similar vein:

However, given that we have now been informed that this matter is outside the purview of WorkSafe BC, we are able to proceed with an internal investigation of our own. You can be assured that we take this matter seriously. Our first action was to establish a general bullying and harassment policy for all to abide by from here on forward. The second will be to address what happened between Esther and Colette on December 5, 2013, at the UFV Clearbrook (sic) site.

Words are always cheap. (*In*)actions speak louder than words. Four months later, Esther and I are still keenly awaiting further Board action on this unfounded WorkSafeBC claim. Given that these false allegations are widely known, and that almost four months have lapsed since they were made, it seems apparent at minimum that the Board has no regard for our urgency of need to have the Board make right the damage already done to us, to prevent that damage from continuing and spreading.

Barry Neufeld’s words to us ring hollow and worse: “You can be assured that we take this matter seriously.” It appears to us rather as “libel” perpetuated by Board inaction and intransigence – despite our several appeals for justice in addressing the issues immediately.

Does the Board actually believe that it/he can be *now* trusted to investigate this fairly (like the police fairly investigating one of its own)? A neutral third party, like Alan Simpson, would have

to do that. Will the Board take such action, now that I am “safely gone” from the agency? I have no reason to trust this Board’s integrity. I have reason to doubt any claim of honourable intent.

In criminal law, the fact of an arrest of a suspect, even when fully innocent, already tarnishes that person’s relationship to others and to the wider community. I remain deeply committed to the work of this ministry. I also know how “word gets around” and harms/destroys reputations... I wonder what doors will be closed to me unbeknownst when I wish to do future ministry. There is a simple word for this: *injustice*. And this is more tragic given its continued victimization potential against me through Board inaction.

Part of Jesus’ instructions to his followers is: “*If someone is inhospitable to you or refuses to listen to your testimony, leave that house or town and shake the dust from your feet* (Matthew 10:14, *The Voice*).

The Board has proved itself towards me/us (and by extension towards Staff, the agency, those served, partners, etc.) for many years to be *inhospitable; has refused to listen to my/our testimony*. There is a text for us all to heed: *The heart is most devious and incurably sick. Who can understand it?* (Jeremiah 17:9, *The Voice*), despite what believers rightly affirm in verse 7. This is at the individual level. At the social level, all human culture participates in “scapegoating”. In 2012 the M2/W2 Board embraced such a sustained scapegoating dynamic against me, in my perception. This is the same dynamic that crucified Jesus. For those interested, an introduction to this ubiquitous phenomenon is found here: [René Girard and Violence](#).

Issue 4: The Board Without Subsequent Apology/Reconciliation Fired Staff and “Constructively Dismissed” the Executive Director in 2012

On January 9 2012, and again, May 17, 2012, the Board passed MOTIONS to reduce my hours by half, then to demote me as Executive Director, a position held since April 1, 1998. (They also fired three other Staff, Bernie Martens included – another tragic story!)

Before the firings/reduction in work time, there had been no Staff/Executive Director Evaluations done; there had been no unresolvable financial agency stress. There were never reasons given for the arbitrary firings and demotion by the Board that represented collaboration or consensus decision-making: such were Board Manual expectations. (Can you relate from your experience? Can you put yourself into the shoes of those so arbitrarily and unjustly treated? Bernie Martens on that occasion agonized in stupefied incomprehension about “What did I do to be so treated?”; “Why me?”. I agonized with him. I have now indicated to him my incomprehension at his full collaboration with the Board as “Interim Executive Director” in what has been experienced as harm that continues being done to the agency, to other Staff, to me.)

A lawyer’s intervention eventually stopped and reversed the demotion immediately. A few months later, my full-time position was reinstated with back pay to the date of my cut-back to half-time. (Reinstatement with back pay for Staff member Bernie Martens also took place due to that intervention.) There appeared to be no altruism in the reversal decisions; there was never

consequent acknowledgement of Board wrongdoing for the enormous turmoil of agency Staff and others that went on for almost all of 2012; there was no reconciliation process.

A recent article in *CCCC³ Bulletin*, January 2014, Issue 1, pp. 14 & 16, entitled: “[Be Flexible, Not Liable: Avoiding Constructive Dismissal Claims⁴](#)”) in my view corroborates the Board’s 2012 actions as a “textbook case” of “constructive dismissal” – as my lawyer informed them and me in 2012. You may ask the office for a copy if you cannot access the article above. I underscore this because the Board spent a lot of money on lawyer services directed against me, which law office may have been in a conflict of interest. (See footnote 6.)

The Board did not directly report to the membership the almost \$6,000 in expenditures contained in the Invoice (see [Law Firm Invoice, Dec 5, 2012](#) – also in the webpage site). Some fees were for other legal services. Most actions as itemized and invoiced appeared to have been directed against the Executive Director. Or how do you read the Invoice?

When I was handed the law firm’s invoice to sign off on⁵, in shock I indicated to the Board that this was in my view egregious misuse of agency funds (which one might have expected in my target position!). That claim was dismissed by the Board.

M2/W2 Association did pay the lawyers’ fees.⁶ I heard the Board tell an interesting story to justify the expenditures. I would love to have opportunity to question the Board further (I did not find the “story” compelling) in a mediation context where there is redress of the power imbalance, so that I am actually heard.

Issue 5: Severe Conflict between Staff and Board Has Remained Unresolved Since 2012

The severe nature of the Staff/Board conflict initiated by the Board through the above series of experiences, necessitated the engagement of mediator Alan Simpson in October/November 2012, and again in June 2013. The [Pre-Mediation Assessment Report](#) (posted on this website), dated “October/November, 2012”, by Alan Simpson and made available at the November 2012 AGM

³ CCCC is the Canadian Council of Christian Charities, our agency’s watchdog. We have always retained their highest annual approval rating. In light of the chronic unresolved conflict in this agency, I wonder if the agency might forfeit that rating.

⁴ You may enter: “75859” for username; “kings” for password. A link is also posted on this website page.

⁵ The invoice was dated December 5, 2012, but only passed on to our bookkeeper January 28, 2013. The last use of the lawyer’s services was November 14, 2012. I believe the Board still owes an explanation to the membership.

⁶ There is a possible conflict of interest given that the law firm engaged is headed by a longstanding personal friend of Board Chair Barry Neufeld. I still wish for opportunity to raise this concern with the Board in a mediated session. This objection was otherwise rejected by the Board.

There was a perceived threat by the Board of possible legal action from me. It was directed towards the Board, not towards the agency. For forty years we have financially contributed to the agency. We never contemplated reversing that collective contribution by costing the agency legal fees! It incurred some nonetheless. Interestingly, these fees began to accumulate before the Board had received my lawyer’s letter that reversed their “constructive dismissal” (that date was June 6, 2012), the one and only piece of legal action the Board experienced. That one action reversed everything (eventually). As you can see if you click on [Law Firm Invoice, Dec 5, 2012](#) the Board engaged lawyer’s services four times before they first heard from me. Sadly, one of those first four occasions was to “Complete research on termination options...” against the Executive Director. Like Bernie Martens, I agonized to understand what I had done to deserve such “summary execution”. There was never a written or a verbal explanation given; there was never, as the Board Manual requires, an annual evaluation of the Executive Director.

to the membership, acknowledged that conflict between Board and Staff had created by then a severe “current conflict crisis” that required urgent resolution. No one disputed that observation, based upon the mediator’s extensive interviews with the key parties.

The following was the mediator’s written recommended course of action in that Report. (See above under **Issue 2** for the “Recommendations” preamble that preceded this.):

SUGGESTED PATHWAY FOR FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS (MEDIATION)

1. Arrange facilitated conversations with a trained external third party mediator/facilitator between the following participants:
 - a. The Board Chair and Executive Director
 - b. Executive Director and other individual board members (offered to all)
 - c. Executive Director and the Board as a group
 - d. The Staff team and the Board as a group
 - e. Some individual Staff and the Board
2. Contact previous staff members and/or board members to determine the need for repair and/or restoration
3. Be prepared to spend 30 to 40 hours in facilitated conversations with the board and staff
4. Review the assessment findings and decide what else can be done to create an environment of honor and respect
5. Do a deeper assessment in the agency for greater organizational health and ministry effectiveness at the board and staff level
6. Provide ongoing training and coaching in communication and conflict management for all board and staff members
7. Provide training in biblical peacemaking for the executive director and board and agree to practicing personal peacemaking as described in the board manual

None of the above suggestions was further discussed by the Board or implemented, though all were consistent with Board Manual policy, as Alan Simpson pointed out several times. Afterwards, Staff experience was as if the mediator’s work had never happened. His efforts, as those of the Board’s lawyer, netted to be sure agency expenses as outcome. In particular, point 7 that adduces the Board Manual, was not taken up by the Board, though it was repeatedly requested by me.

Instead, the Board authorized what appeared in my experience to have been a sop: a further three-hour process June 6, 2013. Nothing more. The Board now adduces the minimalist “outcome” of that process (see below), as its having done what was needed to achieve “reconciliation”. It ignored Alan Simpson’s (now) prophetic words: “The board cannot continue in the same patterns of dysfunction without causing increasing damage to the whole agency. Yet, it appears that the board is not quite ready or able to work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency.”

The Staff and only two Board members (of four) took the initiative on that occasion to say, “Let’s move ahead at least for the good of the agency.” To be clear: **There was no presentation at that session or resolution at that session of any issue between Board and Staff.** (Alan Simpson had written in his Report, “Be prepared to spend 30 to 40 hours in facilitated conversations with the board and staff” on such issues, not 3 to 4 hours.) The Board seemed to have dropped all pretence even of encouraging a full reconciliation process. That hard work is still needed to be done, as I have repeatedly requested. (More on this below.) I get it: as a volunteer Board member over the years many times, this is all time-consuming. Theologically however, there is always enough “time” to do what is needed, for time is a relational gift from God at creation (see Genesis 1, and the book review for more on “time” and much else: [The Lost World](#)).

As all know from personal experience: issues otherwise unaddressed/unresolved continue to do harm psychologically to those victimized, and to all others impacted – in this case to Staff, volunteers, members, our agency partners, and those we serve, etc. This has been happening, especially to Staff, for months in the latest conflict flare-up (more on this below), and for years otherwise. But the Board has not yet acted to embrace a full process of reconciliation.

Such *inaction* in my view contradicts Gospel Reality. I believe it also contradicts psychological Reality. As the Civil Rights mantra has always been: “If one is not part of the solution, one is part of the problem.”

Alan Simpson conducted June 6, 2013 the session with all Board and Staff present. The mediator’s comments the next day about the session were:

[Sent to all Board and Staff]

07/06/2013 11:55 AM

Subject: Carry forward items - notes from last night M2 Meeting

Hi M2 gang,

It was a privilege to be with you and contribute to your meeting last night. I applaud your courage, compassion and commitment with each other. You made significant strides towards repairing hearts and restoring relationships. I am confident that you have the strength within your group to “re-set” and move forward as an agency. Your clients depend on you for hope. Your volunteers look to you for leadership. Your donors expect you to build a future together.

The work you did last night was healing and hopeful. These are the comments I heard from you about moving forward together:

- Relationship building

- work on building trust by being trustworthy and giving trust to others
- work on providing better communication and information sharing
- encourage conversations that connect people not just information
- test assumptions by asking clarifying questions (seek first to understand)
- resist the urge to blame, point fingers or make judgments about other peoples (*sic*) intentions
- resist the urge to bring up the items on the wall (unless working on future changes)
- resolve future issues quickly by using the conflict resolution policy in board manual

...

Alan

In a later e-mail to me that day, Alan Simpson drew attention to this: the Board Chair and one other Board member (of four) had not participated in a final laying-on of hands of the issues [“on the wall” sticky notes placed there by all Staff and Board] between Staff and Board, with a prayer over them by the mediator, in a bid to symbolically move the agency beyond the issues. He also acknowledged that there had been no process to resolve the issues. There absolutely was no time for that.

The other Board member never gave an explanation to Staff for non-participation. The Board Chair did so months later in November privately to the Executive Director. He said in e-mail correspondence November 20, 2013: “I declined to take part in the ‘hands on’ ritual, because as an Orthodox Deacon, I am forbidden to do this: such an act is restricted to bishops.” In a consequent discussion with his parish priest, it was confirmed that Neufeld was not a “Deacon” in the Orthodox Church (“Sub-Deacon” as he has used in e-mail correspondence is akin to “altar boy” in Roman Catholicism – a different, non-leadership role); that laying on of hands in the Orthodox Church was not restricted to Bishops only... I’d like to ask the Board Chair for a further explanation in a mediation session.

Of concern is this: Half the Board members (two) did not then or since commit to Staff to move forward for the good of the agency, while all Staff members did so through participation in the laying on of hands.

This did not augur well for future Staff/Board relationships, nor for the agency. Staff were well aware of this.

Final Disturbing Experience at M2/W2 Office, March 31, 2014

The notice to membership of my concerns ([Executive Director’s Official Last Message to Membership](#)) was sent to members with e-mails March 30, 2014. On March 31, 2014, my final official day as Executive Director, I went to the office in part to send out notices to those

members without e-mails. **Something happened there that speaks to the sad current dysfunction within M2/W2.**

After I arrived at the office, the contractor suddenly appeared at my inside office doorway. I said that I would not talk with her. There began talking “at” me regardless about the recent mailing to membership. I heard immediately that I had no business being in the office: she the contractor initially hired by me, I the Executive Director...

I put my head down and sat silently while the talking continued. (This was a deliberate non-violent tactic used widely.) After some time, I asked that person to please leave. That person refused: not before I responded, I was told. I was eventually followed to the printer, still experiencing that talking. Finally, I hurriedly returned to my office and shut the door. That ended the talking.

The actions were annoyance at minimum. What was said over that time was not pleasant, though I tried to tune out.

Shortly afterwards, a Board member showed up in the office. I said, “Hi [and used the first name].” That person quipped, “Back at it, eh?” (I have no clear idea exactly what this meant, but it did not sound pleasant.) That person immediately went to consult with the other person behind a closed office door, then left. I was shortly afterwards informed by a Staff person that the police had been, or would be called. (One can conjecture how this action was authorized; how it was ethically justified...) I packed up my backpack and left. The two persons in this experience have close ties to the Abbotsford police. Given those “power over” odds against me, I thought it prudent that I leave. I did not need a (granted bizarrely unwarranted) “incident” with the police.

I returned moments later to pick up my wallet inadvertently left in my office. I found the front door locked! The contractor was standing at the front door, but would not unlock it to let me in. (I had already handed in all my office keys.) I had to call through the door that I had come to retrieve my wallet. Several Staff were standing within eye- and earshot. No one moved to open the door to let me in. I waited outside the M2/W2 office door for someone to bring me my wallet – in shocked disbelief.

A Staff member eventually retrieved my wallet, then brought it not to the front door, but walked through the back door and down the hallway to the exit door onto the patio, and handed me my wallet.

It felt bizarre and surreal. I had just been physically barred from entering my own office!

Thus ended my career of 26 years total on Staff with M2/W2, 40 years a volunteer and donor, 6 years a Board member, etc., etc. with these experiences the legacy:

- Police action apparently threatened against me. (For what?! The “crime” of informing the membership of debilitating agency dysfunction?)

- Barred from re-entering the office, though I was on that day still Executive Director.
- No explanation given from anyone at the time or since.
- Ignominious treatment. Like I had just been “run out of Dodge City”; like I was a Black in the deep South suddenly ordered off the bus or out of the restaurant, or... Wow (I say, still reeling)!
- No chance to say farewells: I had gone to the office also to say my final farewells. They were left unsaid.

Fellow M2/W2 Association members: No one at M2/W2 in normal circumstances ever deserves the treatment dished out at the M2/W2 office on March 31, 2014: not any volunteer, not any Board member, not any prisoner/ex-prisoner, not any Staff, etc. This indicates severe dysfunction for such an incident ever to have taken place. The agency needs deep healing before it can continue authentically in its longstanding ministry mandate. M2/W2 Association – Restorative Christian Ministries needs a mediator to work its conflicts through restoratively.

This experience eloquently contradicts the Board’s call for an Extraordinary General Meeting, April 17, 2014. An Extraordinary General Meeting would be structured to perpetuate Board “power over” actions that have created agency dysfunction for years. Were I to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting as now structured, it would be *extraordinarily unsafe for me, as my workplace became since January 2014; as my own office became in surreal escalation March 31, 2014.* (I wrote this last sentence before attending the EGM. More on that follows.)

At minimum, a professional mediator, ideally Alan Simpson (whom I have recontacted), should be present to facilitate the meeting.

I appeal to the membership: rather than an “Extraordinary General Meeting”, hold the Board accountable to call for a full process of agency reconciliation.

Mediator Alan Simpson wrote the following in the [Pre-Mediation Assessment Report](#), October/November 2012:

M2W2 board (including the executive director) has a dilemma that requires a collective effort to solve. The board cannot continue in the same patterns of dysfunction without causing increasing damage to the whole agency. Yet, it appears that the board is not quite ready or able to work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency...

There is danger in seeking a quick fix for this current crisis due to financial restraints and the prolonged organizational dysfunction. When the board decides to move forward in a collaborative manner the following pathway might assist your agency...

Extraordinary General Meeting, April 17, 2014

The Board did not appoint mediator Alan Simpson, nor any other neutral mediator to facilitate the EGM. It appointed one of its own Board members. Neutrality was therefore a structured impossibility. That member knew in fact of my opposition to his appointment as a Board member.

When I had asked that appointed moderator earlier to discuss my concerns, he who had known me for 30 years, wrote in an e-mail response November 27, 2013:

Hello Wayne

Thanks for your email inviting me to a discussion with you.

I have decided to decline at this time in order to maintain my unbiased objectivity on issues before the Board. Yours in Christ

Core to Restorative Justice is simply talking out differences. This person refused to do so. No one on the current Board at my invitation in some instances, or otherwise, has been willing to talk with me directly about agency issues/differences. Bluntly: “Restorative Justice” is not understood by this Board.

Another Board member wrote me when invited to a similar conversation: “First, thanks for [the] invite but I try to avoid conflict - life's too short...”

The Interim Executive Director has refused to talk with me for months. When quietly and respectfully asked again for that courtesy at the close of the EGM, he declined with one word: “No.”

When I yet again invited the contractor to a mediated dialogue in front of all at the EGM, she again declined. As indicated above, she astoundingly claimed that she as a “professional” knew that I was not ready for such an encounter.

I say simply: refusal to talk out differences is surest recipe for perpetuating conflict. It is a rejection of core Restorative Justice values from the outset. “Objectivity” is not maintained when there is no dialogue: “prejudice” perpetuates however. “Life” is not lived where conflict is not addressed, where there is refusal to dialogue. The stuff of life is conflict. Life is too short *not* to address conflict through open dialogue. To avoid conflict is to avoid life. Restorative Justice practice is not remotely understood or embraced without willingness and engagement to talk out differences, no matter what claimed “competencies” and “professional” expertise by any party to conflict. Refusal to dialogue is refutation of any claimed Restorative Justice commitment.

One does not protect oneself by not engaging dialogue in a conflict. One only harms oneself further. The conflict passage in Matthew 18 is the first principle of biblical ecclesiology, when one realizes the promise of Christ’s presence to the “two or three gathered” is to resolve conflict, to (re)create unity, so that the world may know God sent Jesus to the world (John 17).

The EGM event as I predicted (sadly) was structured as “power over” manoeuvre by the Board: as such it was so contrary to all the agency stands for in its core values, in its Board Manual, in

how as Executive Director I attempted to lead the agency the last 16 years; have written and spoken about widely the past 40 years.

The room set-up looked like a criminal court: the persons of power (the Board members) sat at the front facing the audience to indicate that power positioning. Inexplicably, the contractor sat at the front! The moderator set rules that tightly controlled the engagement. The process was adversarial, as one member discovered when he tried to challenge it and was quickly silenced.

On the contrary, a Restorative Justice process is invariably set in a circle; any rules of engagement are raised by the mediator(s)/facilitator(s) for discussion and mutual agreement; no one occupies (in Jesus' words) the "important seats", namely (in criminal court terms) the Judge's seat(s). There is complete ban on "judging", as in Jesus's words, "Judge not". That the contractor also occupied such a position, was obviously invited to do so by the Board, was surest indication of how non-restorative the EGM engagement was in the very "power over" structure of it.

The forum in other words was completely contrary to everything Restorative Justice stands for, to the "bottom up" approach to consensus decision making the agency stands for according to the Board Manual, to any kind of human conflict resolution process that facilitates dialogue to achieve understanding and unity. The EGM was structured contrary to all that is meant in our agency's name: "Restorative Christian Ministries".

Not surprisingly, Esther Northey and I were repeatedly criticised by the contractor and by some Board members. There was no respectful forum response availability, as in Restorative Justice process that eschews anyone being given "control" of proceedings, such as the moderator held, such as the Board and the contractor represented by occupying the "top-down" seats. We had to just sit and be "dumped on" so "power over" oriented were the proceedings. The moderator at one point even lectured me about the unreasonableness of my expectation to have been consulted by the Board about new Board appointments, of which he was one. Consultation/collaboration was the very nub of the issue I was raising, and he simply failed to see. (Not to mention that the Board Chair had promised "full consultation with the Executive Director about Board appointments" at last year's AGM that the moderator had attended! Though this was claimed at the EGM as having happened, I, the person so promised, had no such experience. Remember MOM/WOW!)

In short: the entire point of the Board Manual thrown out, of core values trampled, of Restorative Justice ways rejected, all repeatedly claimed by me for the past four years, fell entirely on deaf years, on blind eyes.

My prepared Statement read that night, ending with an appeal to you the membership to call the agency to a full Restorative Justice process of reconciliation, appeared to be so much spitting in the wind. It is below as Appendix II.

But nothing is ever lost in God's economy, in God's Kingdom already begun but not yet fully here... There is always hope that does not disappoint (Romans 5).

Conclusion

I shared this January 14, 2014 with the Board:

“I preface what I say below with this: I believe in and have operated on a core commitment to the possibility of change/conversion in people. I believe no one is impossibly locked into behaviour patterns, actions or consequences. I therefore retain hope for myself and all that “people can change!” Glory, hallelujah! I therefore embrace the spirit of hope “*that does not disappoint*”. I love Romans 5:5: *And hope will never fail to satisfy our deepest need because the Holy Spirit that was given to us has flooded our hearts with God’s love (The Voice).*

Further documentation is available upon request – beyond what is on this website page. Two additional documents on the website page are the [Final Board/Staff Report and Briefing Notes for Leadership Transition April 2014](#); and [Position Profile for Executive Director \(2014\)](#). You are also welcome to ask for any documentation from the Board. You have that right since Board is responsible to the membership.

Again: you are encouraged to talk to any Board member, to the contractor, and to the Interim Executive Director. *My (repeated) request is only: if you do so, please also talk with me/us.*

You as members may now decide what actions if any you will take. I have done my duty.

I repeat:

I now plead to the membership in the name of God and in the name of justice: *please hold the Board, please hold the “Interim Executive Director”, accountable to do the right thing:*

- *to initiate a full process of reconciliation immediately according to the agency’s core values in the Board Manual;*
- *to retract fully and publicly its “libel”!*

May God have mercy!

Wayne Northey
Outgoing Executive Director

APPENDIX I

Below are the values in full, as mentioned in Footnote 1. The Board has ignored these values and related procedures, though at the EGM it claimed the opposite.

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict sometimes results when people disagree, whether they are doing so gracefully or harshly. Each person brings an individual style and cultural background to conflict. These differences need to be acknowledged.

Times of conflict are important to the health of M2/W2 Association. They provide opportunity for hearing each other, for seeking the voice of God together, for exploring important issues, and for producing better, more creative decisions.

Conflict is not in itself a sign of organizational dysfunction. Indeed, suppressing or avoiding conflict damages a work environment. A healthy organization affirms the differences, responds creatively when those differences result in conflict and refuses to tolerate disrespectful or violent responses to the conflict. M2/W2 Association is committed to creating an atmosphere of dealing openly and directly with conflict, and encouraging all parties to relate to each other with mutual respect in appreciation of God's creative work in all of our lives. M2/W2 Association also recognizes that conflict can be extremely taxing and disruptive. It is neither to be embraced lightly, *nor* to be swept under the table.

The Bible contains much conflict and says many things about conflict. Several key principles are:

- Conflict is natural. God created each of us as unique individuals with the freedom to make choices. Our different choices often produce conflict as a natural byproduct (Genesis 1).
- God is present in conflict. It is an opportunity for truth to be revealed, for change to happen, and for people to draw together (Acts 6:1-12, Acts 15:1-12, Matthew 18:20).
- To make conflict constructive and to avoid sin, we need an attitude from all parties of love, humility and respect (I Cor. 13:4-7, Matthew 7:1-5, Romans 14, 1 Peter 3:8-16); we need good communication (James 1:19, John 7:51, Prov. 18:13, Eph. 4:15); and we need an effective process (Matt. 18:15-20, Acts 6 and Acts 15).

II. PROVISIONS

- A. M2/W2 Association endorses the following problem-solving process for working through both small and large conflicts. Step I (below) should be and is used informally and loosely on a daily basis in routine situations involving conflict. If a conflict escalates, Step I should be implemented more formally, then subsequent steps must be taken if necessary.
- B. Staff should use this procedure regularly and do so early in the development of conflict. It is inappropriate to allow a conflict to simply fester. It is important to keep the process moving, and not let weeks go by between steps.
- C. This process is appropriate for relational conflicts in both peer relationships and in supervisee/supervisor relationships. It is not an appropriate process to resolve substantive differences about programmatic or departmental matters.

- D. In supervisee/supervisor relationships there is a power imbalance and supervisees may not be comfortable confronting or communicating openly with a supervisor. It is the role of the supervisor to check in regularly with supervisees in order to work out problems before they escalate, to be open and “confrontable,” to provide safe space for dealing with conflict and to initiate problem solving when aware of conflict. Supervisees or supervisors may wish to seek the assistance of a facilitator/trusted person to help them work through a conflict.
- E. Concerns about the substance of policy, suggestions for policy changes and conflicts around policy exceptions should be directed to the Personnel Committee.
- F. This process is a flexible one and can be modified in most M2/W2 Association settings to fit the situation, keeping the fundamental principles in mind.
- G. M2/W2 Association sees “success” not in the absence of conflict, but in how conflict is handled ((*M2/W2 Association – Restorative Christian Ministries Board Manual*, revised January 25, 2010, pp. 27 & 28).

APPENDIX II

Below is the Statement I read to the members gathered at the EGM, April 17, 2014.

Statement, EGM. April 17, 2014

I wish to draw attention to one concern; to quote from mediator Alan Simpson a few times; to quote two sentences from the Board Manual; to make five brief comments; to end with an appeal in three points.

The concern is: It is my experience that this agency for some years has been caught in debilitating agency dysfunction.

The quote from Alan Simpson is contained in his [Pre-Mediation Assessment Report](#):

The board cannot continue in the same patterns of dysfunction without causing increasing damage to the whole agency. Yet, it appears that the board is not quite ready or able to work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency.

A further quote is from Alan Simpson’s e-mail to all Staff and Board June 7, 2013:

These are the comments I heard from you [Staff and Board] [that are “healing and hopeful”] about moving forward together:… [the agency should] “resolve future issues quickly by using the conflict resolution policy in [the] board manual”

Step 4 of the Board Manual’s Conflict Resolution policy reads:

If the Executive Director is party to the conflict, or if a member of the Board is a party, then the matter shall be taken to a non-Board member agreed to by the disputing parties. If either party rejects use of such “binding arbitration”, **the way forward shall be discerned with prayer and consultation with all parties.**

Some comments are:

- For years, the Board and Executive Director, Staff included, have been parties to a debilitating conflict.
- The consequent “prolonged dysfunction” has indeed caused “increasing damage to the whole agency.”
- There has indeed also been agency failure to “work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency.” The problems have persisted.
- When the Executive Director and Board went to a “non-Board member”, mediator Alan Simpson, according to Step 4 of the Board Manual conflict resolution policy, we were consequently informed in writing by the mediator:

There is danger in seeking a quick fix for this current crisis due to financial restraints and the prolonged organizational dysfunction. When the board decides to move forward in a collaborative manner the following pathway might assist your agency...
- The recommended “pathway” (see above) laid out by Alan Simpson in some detail has not been implemented by the agency.

Fellow members: **I appeal to you:**

- To call for a full reconciliation process to address this agency’s longstanding dysfunction, through employment of a professional mediator tasked to mediate fully all the conflict issues, and report back to the membership at the next Annual General Meeting;
- to not permit this Extraordinary General Meeting to be used as that kind of reconciliation forum, for there is no professional mediator present and previously tasked for such a multi-level, time-consuming process;
- to hold the agency accountable to pursue a **“way forward [that] shall be discerned with prayer and consultation with all parties”**.

And a reminder: Tomorrow is Good Friday... *but Sunday is a comin’!* And hope will not disappoint! Amen.

Thank you.