

Dear Church,

I write, or if the Lord wills read this letter to you with a broken heart and with much love and prayer. My purpose in this letter is to make the church aware of three issues. Firstly, my present dispute with the pulpit committee, secondly the subject of that dispute and lastly address common issues and concerns raised about my absence and items likely to be raised about my behaviour as your interim President and Interim Pastoral carer. You can be assured that everything I will be sharing is biblically sound and legally safe.

DISPUTE WITH THE PULPIT COMMITTEE

The Issue

Many of the church members will recall that during a couple of meetings held on Sunday the 11 and 18th of September 2016 the church agreed that although constitutionally the pulpit committee has the power to manage the day to day affairs of the church together with the selection of a new Pastor, it was presented to the church and voted on and agreed by the members that its power would be delegated out to other individuals. The two offices and individuals appointed with that delegated power was Brother Mansour as Vice President and myself as President. The Vice President was assigned powers to manage the administrative functions of the church, whereas I was to manage the Pastoral care functions of the church.

The church leadership was therefore to consist of the Church President, Vice President and Pulpit Committee each with their separate powers and responsibilities.

A dispute arose early on amongst the church leadership between myself, the Vice President and the Pulpit committee. This dispute was about my desire to be transparent with the entire church body about the sins of Nabeel, the second perpetrator and the number of victims involved with both parties. The pulpit Committee and the Vice President are of the firm view that we do not need to be transparent.

Why do I desire transparency?

Some of you may ask why is this an issue for me. Some may even say that we heard some of the information through Brother Maroun at the start, why do we need to know more. What is your purpose behind wanting to give disclosure to the church?

The simple answer to all the above is that I desire, as the pastoral carer to present to the church the need for church discipline. Furthermore, to preach to the church the biblical doctrine of church discipline so we know how to practice it. God's Word makes it very plain that he intends discipline of various types to be a part of church life, passage like **Matthew 18:15-19, 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, Titus 2:15, Revelation 2:2** are a small sample of the scriptures that provide for church discipline in scripture. It is always glorifying to God when we obey his Word rather than cater to our own ease and expediency. My concern and what I know to be the concern of the church is to do all to the glory of God.

Some of you may then say, I understand your desire for glorifying God through church discipline but what does this have to do with your dispute with the Pulpit Committee and particularly you're wanting to be transparent?

In order to answer that properly and biblically, I need to give a short explanation of what church discipline is.

What is Church Discipline?

Church discipline is both a simple and complex issue. On one hand it is simple in that, it is discipline of a member of a church by the body of the church. Remembering that we are one body in Christ according to **Romans 12:4-5** and **Ephesians 2:18-19**.

In order for the Church to exercise discipline in a scriptural and informed manner, it must know the issues for which it is being called upon to decide. This is supported by scripture. For example, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 talks about punishment for a sinner in the church. This correction is not vindictive or joyous punishment. Christians in the Corinthian church were to gather together in order to take action against the offending brother.

1Co 5:4 *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

1Co 5:5 *To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Paul defines this as "**punishment which was inflicted of many**" in 2 Corinthians 2:6.

Again Matthew 18:15-19 talks of church discipline, however you see in the following verse the bringing the disciplinary issues before the whole church to judge sin.

Mat 18:17 *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

And perhaps the most significant passage, as it talks specifically about elders (please remember the New Testament scripture uses the word elder as something synonymous with Pastor or Shepherd etc). So the passage is specifically talking about those in a Pastoral office. Please note this applies to both Nabeel and the second Perpetrator. As the second perpetrator was a preacher and teacher and at the time of his offences with the 4th known victim. He was also the Vice President of the church when he committed his sin with the 4th victim.

1Ti 5:19 *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.*

1Ti 5:20 *Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.*

1Ti 5:21 *I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.*

First Timothy 5:19 tells us to accept a charge against an elder only on the witness of two or three witnesses, echoing Deuteronomy 19:15-21 and Matthew 18:15-17. However, in this case Nabeel confessed and admitted to the sin as did the second perpetrator. That leads us to v 20, which clearly provides that sin is to be rebuked before all that others may also fear. Then it

finishes with v 21 that clearly says to do nothing by partiality and don't prefer one person above another. I feel as though the Pulpit Committee has done this in their inconsistent treatment of Nabeel versus the second perpetrator.

The goal of this corrective measure and transparency is to make every effort for Christians who love their wayward brother or sister to show their overwhelming sorrow and concerns in an effort to compel the sinner and the person offended against towards repentance and reconciliation with God, their victims and their church. This requires transparency with the church body, that we might show love to Nabeel, the second perpetrator and their respective victims for the glory of God.

The above explains my desire for transparency and I hope shows to you my heart for glorifying God and being true to his Word as you the church would expect of someone in this office. But this does not answer the question as to why do we need more disclosure when the pulpit committee gave us the details shortly after Nabeel made his confession.

In order to address this issue, I need to explain the complex issues of church discipline and outline why Church Discipline is exercised.

Why and how is Church Discipline exercised?

For the sake of time I will try keep this explanation short. The reasons for exercising church discipline and its process are defined by scripture as follows;

1. When sin has come between Christians, the goal of church discipline is repentance and reconciliation.
2. Church leaders must always pursue the protection of the gospels reputation and wellbeing of the entire church and not just the individuals who have sinned. This explains why sometimes individuals must be put out of church (**Deuteronomy 17:7, 19:19, 21:21, 22:24; 1 Corinthians 5:13; 2 Corinthians 2:7; Revelation 2:2**)
3. Such matters in the church are entrusted to Christian leaders who must be careful not to abuse in any way the responsibility given to the leadership, see **1 Peter 5:1-5**, in particular v 3 "**Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.**"
4. Discipline is unpleasant but, in the end, produces a holy people by distinguishing between the world and the church **Hebrews 12:11**.
5. All things in the church, including discipline, are to be done in an orderly manner **1 Corinthians 14:40**.
6. For the truth to emerge, the church must hear firsthand reports from all sides of a dispute before a decision is reached. See **Proverbs 18:1**, the entirety of **Acts 15** being the dispute about circumcision and salvation. You see in that passage the multiplicity of witnesses and views offered prior to a judgment being handed down by James. Even more clearly you see this clearly outlined in **Deuteronomy 19:15-21** where witness is offered before the whole church. All of which clearly support that the entirety of the story must be heard before a decision is made in regard to church discipline.

Although I believe that the desire of both myself, the Vice President and the pulpit committee is the same for items 1 and 2 above, I do not believe they have followed the principle set out in item 6. That is transparency of the sins of Nabeel and the second perpetrator have not been

fully disclosed by a multitude of witnesses to the church to allow it to make an informed decision Guided by the Holy Spirit regarding church discipline for each of these members.

My first reason is to be faithful to the office the church has nominated me into as provided in his Word. However, I have a further reason being that of church unity among the body of the church.

Church Unity

I have been nominated by the church as its temporary shepherd or President. My desire is to be a faithful shepherd of Gods flock through continued unity in the church as was expressed by Jesus Christ in his High Priestly prayer of **John 17:21**.

Joh 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Jesus desired that we would be unified together in unity in a similar way as God the trinity is unified, as a testimony of Jesus' gospel.

Paul reaffirms this position in his letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:10 he says

1Co 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

He expressly provides that there is to be no divisions, we are to be of the same mind and specifically in the same judgment. How can that happen without transparency from the leaders to its congregation. In fact, I can attest, as can many of you, that many people have left our church because of the lack of transparency that has led to a different mind and judgment amongst the body of Christ.

How can we as a church be in unity without transparency?

All the above sets out in summary the reason for my conviction according to both scripture and the nominated office I am in to be transparent with you as a congregation. It is this issue that the Vice President together with the Pulpit Committee is divided with me on.

What has this led to?

The conflict regarding transparency has been an ongoing issue between myself and the rest of the church leadership since the disclosure made by brother Nabeel.

The issue seemed to be heading towards resolution, when during a meeting held between the member of the pulpit committee (of which I am a part), Brother Maroun suggested that we form a plan to map out the process the committee is undertaking towards providing full disclosure to the church. Although the matter was not formally agreed to, the Pulpit Committee did not object to a draft being prepared and considered at a later time. Thought by the end of that month Bother Maroun had been removed from the Pulpit Committee and church ministry and as a result resigned his church membership. Accordingly, that plan was never finalised or presented to the committee.

However, during Brother Maroun's exit, the Pulpit Committee did provide its formal view regarding transparency by stating that the "*Bible requires us to be honest not transparent*".

Things came to a head at a meeting held by the committee on Friday 3 February 2017. At that meeting I had expressed in writing to the committee my desire to be transparent with the church as I see is the requirement of my office function according to both scripture and the church appointed authority as the Pastoral leader of the church.

My request to the committee addressed the following;

1. My concern that the committee was operating outside of their appointed function by dictating that we are not to be transparent to the church body. As expressed earlier in my letter this is inconsistent with **1 Peter 5:1-5**, specifically v 3 **“Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”**
2. Issues of church discipline regarding a number of the committee members, though that is not a matter for this letter. I have expressed my concerns to the committee, who are required to bring the matter before the church.
3. My request to be able to address the church and be transparent. I advised as part of that request, if they refuse me the right to bring it before the church, then I would still meet my scriptural and office requirements by sending an open letter to members providing them with transparency regarding the sins of Nabeel and the second perpetrator.

The committee refused my request and in response decided by majority that they would place me under church discipline for what they saw as blackmail. Specifically that I would be transparent with the church one way or another.

Further, the committee decided that they would step me down from preaching roster and I was not allowed behind the pulpit. I was scheduled to preach on Sunday 5 February 2017. I responded and advised that they did not have the power to impose church discipline without bringing a sin issue before the church and obtaining a church ruling and that until such time as that happened they could not take control of the Pastoral care functions of the church.

I proposed to continue to preach on Sunday 5 February 2017. In response to which they advised that they would physically remove me from the pulpit if I went up to preach. On that basis, I decided not to approach the pulpit today so as not to grieve the church membership, confuse visitors and most important bring disrepute to Jesus Christ and his church. For that I apologise to you the congregation for not fulfilling my Pastoral duty to you.

In response to the allegations I point out that Blackmail requires by its nature that I threaten someone with something in exchange for them giving me something in return. In this case I made no threats to the Pulpit Committee, but simply stated the fact that I intend to be transparent with the church congregation regarding the sexual sin that has plagued the church. I do not desire or ask for anything in return. It was not a threat, nor was it in any way used as an exchange for them doing something for me. So it cannot be considered a threat or blackmail. I desire nothing from the pulpit committee.

Further my statement for transparency is consistent with scripture as previously outlined earlier in this letter.

There are other very serious matters that I have addressed the pulpit committee on our last meeting 2nd of February. I have written these concerns to the pulpit committee and then planned to discuss them in our meeting. I will do things biblically and wait for a response before I take these specific matters before the church.

Lastly their failure to allow me to operate within my church appointed function and their overstepping the powers of their function has meant that the committee has self-appointed itself into the Pastoral Care function of the church and removed its current Pastoral leader from fulfilling that function. The bible speaks strongly against that in the epistle of John.

3Jn 1:9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

3Jn 1:10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

This passage speaks clearly of John rebuking Diotrephes who has self-appointed himself into the leadership of the church and providing the church with direction and instruction as a Pastoral leader ordinarily would.

CHURCH DISCLOSURE

This brings me to the hardest part of my letter and that is the formal disclosure to the church membership of the sexual sin by Nabeel and the second perpetrator. Nabeel was the church president and the second perpetrator was the Vice President at the time the sexual sin occurred with his 4th known victim. As outlined in the earlier part of this letter, the scripture provides details on church discipline and particular sin as it concerns leaders in the church (**1 Timothy 5:19-21**).

I will deal with each person respectively and provide disclosure accordingly. Please keep in mind that the following disclosure is so that we as a church can act consistent with scripture and sorrow with, console and exhort the parties towards repentance and reconciliation in love.

Nabeel Zaydan

As many of you will know on 27 August 2016 Nabeel Zaydan confessed to an indecent act some 27 years ago. On 28 August 2016 some further details were provided by brother Maroun Azzi. I do not wish to go into details regarding the disclosure but will provide disclosure of all the parties respective version of the sin that transpired.

I will begin with Nabeel's version

1. The Victim was 15 at the time of the incident.
2. It was involuntary
3. It was one time
4. It was prior to his taking on the Pastoral leadership of FBC though assistant to the pastor at the time
5. There was sexual indecency on his part
6. That he was disqualified
7. Nabeel has said that the issue came out because the victim had sent him a blackmail email.
8. There was a second victim that he made sexual advances towards because but nothing transpired because she resisted.

The Victim provides the following;

1. The sin occurred on multiple separate occasions.

2. It happened between 14 and 15 years of age.
3. It involved significantly greater indecency on Nabeel's part than what Nabeel has confessed to.
4. Her intention was never for this to go public, or for Nabeel to step down.

Please note I have seen the alleged blackmail email and make the following observation;

1. It makes no threats.
2. It makes no mention of the church
3. It does not ask Nabeel to step down.
4. It expresses the hurt the victim has felt for many years.

I have the victim's permission to share the email with you should you wish for me to read it, or otherwise wish to see a copy for yourself. More so you are free to ask the victim. The victim was and is still willing to share her side of the story to the pulpit committee to anyone who asks.

In more recent times, there have been more disclosures that we are working on and once finalised we will be transparent with the church and further transparent with the law. These disclosures support the claims of the victim.

2nd Perpetrator

For legal reasons, we still need to conceal the name of the second perpetrator. In due time, it is important that we be transparent with the church and identify who the second perpetrator is. That being said it is important that we be transparent with the church regarding his actions.

Perpetrator two's victims were identified in the course of the investigation of Nabeel's sin. During that time 3 individuals came forward and confessed to having been sexually abused by perpetrator 2. In receiving that disclosure, the church sub-committee which consisted of myself, David Feghali, Maroun Azzi and Peter Fahd met with Perpetrator 2 on 7 September 2016.

We confronted him with the allegations and during the course of that conversation, he confessed to a fourth victim.

The above is the history of how we came to identify the 4 victims abused by perpetrator 2. However, to provide you with the facts, they are as follows;

1. Perpetrator 2 admits to the 4th victim but has not admitted to the other 3.
2. The first 3 victims were allegedly abused over 30 years ago.
3. The 4th victim was abused only 10 years ago.
4. All 4 victims were minors when the sexual assault occurred.
5. The 4th victim had more prolonged sexual abuse than the other 3.

As the interim president and pastoral carer of the church, I have personally fulfilled my obligation and reported both matters to the relevant authorities.

The problem with the lack of transparency with the church, is that many rumours have caused much defamation to the victim and her family. Though we are all not perfect, it is important to show love and respect to the victim and her family which will bring healing. At the moment, she has been experiencing much shunning because of the false rumours of the narrative of the events.

Though no one is perfect, not me, not you nor the victim, we need to stop and rectify the shunning of some towards the victim.

Also, though the 2 perpetrators need to be under church discipline, we need to be prepared to show them mercy and forgiveness. That being said, as part of their church discipline, that should not be able to attend the church until

1. The Police Investigation is completed
2. They make full confessions
3. If or when the victims are willing, they will reconcile with the victims

I recommend the church write a formal letter, informing Nabeel and perpetrator 2 of their suspension asking them not to attend church until further notice.

We also need to formally inform any church that the perpetrators may attend of the current investigations.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE AND OTHER ISSUES

Many members of the church have asked me about my absence over the last couple of months. Also others have mentioned that there was a perceived conflict between myself and Nabeel following his confession in August 2016.

Prior to responding to the above, I want to stress to the church that I love Nabeel Zaydan and also love my brothers in the Pulpit Committee.

In order to respond to both these items I need to provide some context of my time as Assistant Pastor to Nabeel.

Approximately two years ago, I noticed an escalating tension between Nabeel, his wife and victim 1. I was lead to believe by Nabeel that victim 1 was out to attack the leadership of the church, namely the Pastor and his wife. Desiring to stand for God's glory and righteousness, with the limited information I knew then, I stood stanchly by our Pastor and his wife.

A number of incidents occurred between Nabeel, his wife and Victim 1 during that time. These incidents would often involve Victim 1 making a comment or a request that would be deemed by Nabeel as a challenge on his leadership to which he would respond by either speaking with the victim and her husband or escalating the matter to the deacons.

However, over the last 2 years Nabeel chose to get me involved. The context I was given, was that Victim 1 was challenging the church leadership and it needed to be addressed.

This lack of proper context led to tension between Victim 1 and me. I didn't have the complete picture and so couldn't counsel Victim 1 properly.

Things became clear when Nabeel made his confession.

Since the confession I have met with Victim 1 and her family and apologized to her for making assumptions about her character and intentions based on what I was told by Nabeel.

I was hurt by Nabeel for having been deceived these many years concerning Victim 1. However, despite that, after Nabeel stepped down, him and I were on good terms and would often exchange encouraging and loving words. This changed on Sunday 18 September 2016.

As many of you know I have been going through my sermon on the mount series for well over 1 year now. I have been going through the passage in its order and happened to be up to **Matthew 7:15**. This passage speaks of false prophets and I preached it accordingly.

Nabeel took this preaching as a personal attack on his character, I know this because Nabeel told me so during our reconciliation. Nabeel told me that he discussed his concern with several people.

Following this many of the church members that are close to Nabeel began to shun me and my family.

As a husband and father, I can bear it when people are either rude, hurtful or otherwise negative towards me. However, when it extends to my family I tend to become more sensitive, as I dare say many men would.

I then began to hear rumors of Nabeel having changed his account and the age of Victim 1.

In response I contacted Nabeel and had a heated conversation with him. However, Nabeel and I have made amends and I have sought and received his forgiveness for that exchange. He also acknowledged that he sandwiched me between himself and the victim. I forgave him.

In response to that call, Nabeel called a meeting with the Pulpit Committee. At that meeting with the committee he proceeded to accuse me of a number of things. He suggested that I was a danger to the church. The meeting would have continued had Brother Maroun not interjected and stopped the meeting. Again I stress that Nabeel and I have made amends over these issues.

I responded to Nabeel's accusations by emailing him a lengthy letter, which responds to each of the accusations provided.

In that time the shunning and mistreatment of me and my family by some continued and intensified.

I had previously before the issue with Nabeel transpired, booked a holiday house for my family in the month of December. With everything happening, I opted to take my previously scheduled leave a fortnight early to allow me to distance myself from the happenings and hurtful shunning being given to me and my family. I believe I did the honourable thing to minister to my neglected family.

Further I felt I had no support from the committee and this coupled with my ongoing issues with me seeking transparency as expressed earlier in the letter, the environment had become unhealthy to the point of being toxic for my family and I.

Then in January I had a previously organised a trip to travel to Israel and Jordan as part of my Morling College curriculum. I had already withdrawn from 2 subjects after Nabeel's disclosure to the church at the cost of \$5,000. I was not prepared, nor could I afford to cancel another subject which would have cost me even more. This meant that I was away until the end of January.

I hope this explains my absence and any concerns you may have about my relationship with Nabeel.

Nabeel and I have since resolved our differences and I want to assure you of my love for him. My desire for transparency has nothing to do with Nabeel, but rather with honouring God by being obedient to his word. My desire is to be transparent regarding both individuals involved in sin.

Brothers please let us be loving and gracious in our discipline and let us always honor his Word for his glory.

Please brothers, this is not about me, it's not about the Pulpit Committee, it's not about the Vice President, or Nabeel or Perpetrator 2, it is about being faithful to the word of God. John writes in the book of Revelation to a number of churches that were not being faithful to the word of God and Jesus warns them that unless they repent and honour his word he will judge them. Let us avoid the wrath of God and elevate his word as our highest authority **Revelation 2:14-25**.

I love you,

Your interim Pastor

Robert Ayoub,