

## **“It's the set time for a renewed commitment to accountability.”**

Sarah Kanaiya

The International Accountability Summit held in Dallas on 13 April during the 2015 CLA Outcomes Conference was a clear sign that a stewardship and accountability movement is gaining momentum in the church. The Summit drew participants from five continents – a strong pointer to the global interest in this critical theme. The growth in ECFA’s membership reflects a similar trend - Dan Busby, ECFA President pointed out that in the last 8 years, ECFA’s membership base has grown by 50% and is expected to hit the 2000 mark in 2015. This is in contrast to attaining 1,250 during the first 26 years of ECFA’s life.

### ***Why the growing interest in accountability?***

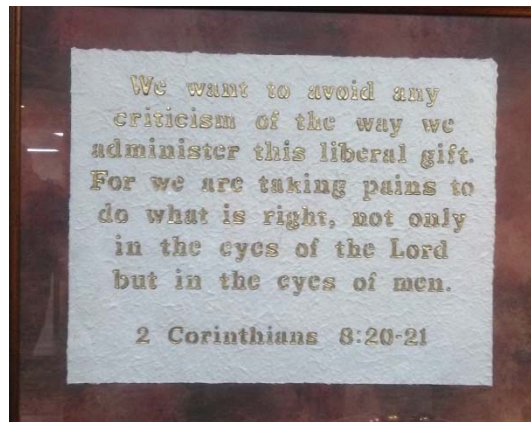
We are at a critical time in history, and the love and light of God needs to be seen in and through the church and other Christ-centered ministries, now, more than ever (Isaiah 60:1-3). As nations grapple with significant challenges related to the times in which we live, we have a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate the wisdom and compassion of the One to whom all nations belong, Jesus Christ.

We live in turbulent times. Economic and social injustices are on the rise, and humanitarian disasters caused by war, plagues, earthquakes, terrorism, and extreme weather are evident on every continent. Whilst these challenges present an amazing opportunity for the church to respond in a distinctive way as light and salt, we recognize that the lack of credibility facing churches in many nations hinders its ability to capitalize on these opportunities. Our ability to speak with moral authority and bring healing into situations is impaired wherever it is perceived as untrustworthy or even worse, as part of the problem.

In Kenya, (where I come from), recent surveys amongst youth have revealed that the church fares poorly when it comes to trust. In Hong Kong, the situation is somewhat similar - the younger generation of leaders increasingly wants to know more about how finances are being spent. And youth take readily to social media, and therefore, another factor that is fuelling the accountability movement is the widespread use of the internet and social media to challenge, expose or simply attack ministries. Ministries can be discredited in minutes when damaging and often unsubstantiated information is shared, on multiple social media platforms, reaching thousands of people nationally and across the globe.

The early church was known for the unusual love that its members had for each other. This love was demonstrated through an unprecedented show of unity, and sacrificial giving, whenever there was an opportunity to help those in need. Transparency and accountability marked their fundraising and fund

administration processes. Paul, when raising funds to assist Christians who had been impacted by the famine in Jerusalem emphasized the need to intentionally pursue accountability when he taught the Corinthian church about giving (2 Cor. 8:20,21). After the CLA Conference, we visited the ECFA office in Winchester, VA where we discovered that this verse is displayed in a prominent place as if to serve as a reminder of the reason why ECFA was founded:



God's seemingly tough response to Ananias and Sapphira's lack of transparency in the way they gave resulted in people running *to* God, not from Him. (Acts 5:1-14). Apparently, God's requirement for holiness in how we handle church finances inspires the kind of reverence and awe that characterize true worship (Hebrews 12:28-29), and will promote fruitfulness in our ministries! However the opposite – unwillingness to be open in our fundraising and use of funds hinders our witness and makes us vulnerable to accusation. The first deacons were appointed in response to a cry for equitable handling of the gifts of God's people and this arrangement, too, was followed by further growth of the church (Acts 6:1-7). Transparency and accountability are signs that we honor the gifts entrusted to us and that we recognize that they were given as an act of worship. Speaking during the Summit about the mobilization of funds to help believers in Jerusalem who were suffering from the effects of famine, Rev. Dr. Gary Hoag, ECFA's international liaison put this well, "The generosity of givers is reciprocated with honoring the gift by ensuring that it is well managed."

ECFA pioneered the peer accountability model amongst churches and Christian non-profits. By convening the Summit, ECFA created an opportunity for likeminded individuals from across the globe to meet to share ideas and challenges faced on the journey towards accountability. It was quite clear that one of the biggest challenges needing confrontation will be cultural. Consider the fact that in Spanish, as well as a number of African languages, there is no word for "accountability"! Asking one's elders to be accountable

and share how they spent or intend to spend funds is likely to be viewed as disrespect. The same holds in China, where the tradition of honor is very strong. We all agreed, however, that, to overcome these cultural barriers one need only uphold the authority of Scripture. The Word is the standard upon which all other standards – cultural or otherwise – must be judged. Put simply, it's time for all of us, regardless of where we come from, to embrace the Word as our standard.

### ***Why the need for standards?***

ECFA accredits its members based on compliance to a set of standards, all of which are based on Scripture. It emerged that all the accountability organizations that are taking shape across the globe have drawn inspiration from these standards. For example, AfCAA and CCFK, (the African and South Korean accountability initiatives respectively) have already compiled a set of standards and both referred to ECFA's standards in the process. As Dan Busby points out in his book *"Trust: the Foundation for Kingdom Fruitfulness,"* it is not possible to be accountable without a set of guidelines, rules and standards to which one can be held accountable.

The theme of the 2015 CLA Outcomes Conference was "Time". The International Accountability Summit took place during this conference, and fittingly, the Summit was, for, me at least, a "Kairos" moment. It was clearly the time the Lord had set to clarify the vision that He has for us. He confirmed that it is, indeed time, for renewed commitment to accountability and integrity in finances amongst all who are called by His name. This commitment will be tested at a personal and corporate level. Personally since the Summit, I've been tested time and time again.

A key theme emerging during the Summit was the critical role that prayer has played in birthing the accountability movement. All the national initiatives were birthed in prayer, sometimes sustained over long periods. For example, prayers for an initiative in Africa started in 2002, whilst in Korea, (Dr Ho Chan Hwang), CCFK's founder, has been laboring in prayer for 30 years. Added to that, CCFK now has a team of intercessors who meet weekly to pray. Prayer was woven seamlessly into the Summit program ensuring that we were left with no doubt that we will need to be dependent on the Lord's divine enablement as we embark on pursuing the vision that He has laid on our hearts and for which He has taken hold of us. As the delegate from India Mr. J.S. Anbu pointed out, "God answers prayer which is specific, substantive and strategic." We, in this global network will need to continuously uphold each other in prayer. So please take time, right now and pray for all the saints everywhere to recognize that it's time to embrace this stewardship and accountability movement. (Ephesians 6:18).