

"THE LARGER COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS"

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The belief that the church of which one is a member is a part of “the larger community of believers” would be expected among people who think of the church as sectarian or denominational. But, when it appears in a college catalogue from a graduate school preparing men for pulpits in churches of Christ, it should signal the need to take corrective action. Beneath the heading on “Identity” the context in which this phrase appears states, “. . . We encourage the open and honest pursuit of truth through past and present resources in the context of historic Christian faith.

“Within the context of these commitments that are shared with the larger community of believers, the Graduate School is particularly committed to providing integrated training for ministry among churches of Christ. These churches embrace the concept of restoration as a theological principle.”¹

“Harding University Graduate School of Religion is a branch school of Harding University in Searcy, Ark.”² Dr. Evertt W. Huffard is Dean/Executive Director.³ The campus is located at 1000 Cherry Road, Memphis, TN 38117.

The President of Harding University is Dr. David B. Burks. The position taken in the 2001-2002 General Catalogue of the graduate school over which he serves as President stands contrasted against what he wrote in January of 2000. He wrote, “*Christ’s church is distinctive*. The new century may bring more questions than answers concerning the identity of the church. But we are the bride of Christ, and as such we have an obligation to know who we are and whose we are: We are the one church Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:4. This strong sense of identity spurs us to truthfully proclaim all aspects of Christ’s church, including a cappella music in worship, the autonomy of the local congregation, the weekly observance of the Lord’s supper, and the role of men and women in and out of the worship assembly.”⁴ Lamentably, the “branch school” in Memphis does not share the view of its president.

Dean Huffard has played a leadership role in the formation and furtherance of the five Community Church Movement-type churches in the Memphis area.⁵ Chameleon-like the organization and administration of these churches variously is referenced as MCPM (Memphis Church Planting Ministry, cf. *Mission Memphis*, Spring 1998, vol. 2, pp. 1-2), MUM (Memphis Urban Ministry, *The Acts of*

Highland Street, 20:49, Dec. 21, 2000, pp. 185, 188) and City Missions (*Server*, 48:13, March 28, 2001, p. 2). The graduate school website says Dean Huffard served as the “Chairman of Steering Committee (1991-1997)” for MUM <www.hugsr.edu/CVs/cv_huff.htm>. The *Harding* magazine reported Dean Huffard was “the impetus behind the forming” of the Downtown Church and stated, “He has spent the last two years directly involved with the church’s planting. . . .”⁶ The so-called contemporary worship consisting of the use of a praise team, hand clapping, testimonials, and the use of religious art in worship (a 25-foot mural of Jesus Christ on the cross) are all presented in the *Harding* magazine article. The source from which such contemptible practices originated is now well known, the Willow Creek Community Church. In his installment address September 30, 1999, the new Dean said, “Over the past six years, we have been blessed to see the growth of an urban ministry apprenticeship in Memphis that has helped start five churches in the city, mostly in poorer neighborhoods. I would like to see this apprenticeship expand to involve our older established churches and the suburban churches. . . .”⁷ Frayser Mission Church reported, “Two ministry apprenticeships are created and filled by students at Harding Graduate School.”⁸ Dean Huffard’s continuing involvement is confirmed from the White Station church bulletin where he is an elder. Leon Sanderson wrote that once each quarter Dean Huffard serves City Missions, which supports MUM and the Downtown Church, as one of the “Executive Consultants.”⁹ All of these sources linking Dean Huffard to these five Community Church Movement-type churches are unprejudiced and share a common interest in their advancement.

Dean Huffard is well aware that Dr. John Mark Hicks, a faculty member at HUGSR and minister of education at Woodmont Hills Family of God in Nashville with Rubel Shelly, planted “The Cordova Community Church, a church of Christ” April 12, 1998. He co-authored “A Theological and Strategic Statement for a New Church Planting” dated October 5, 1997, which was drafted right from Rick Warren’s *Purpose Driven Church*. On pages 5-6 he wrote that God may act through miracles today and instrumental music in worship is not a salvation issue.

Further, February 7, 2002, in concert with the Student Association Dean Huffard brought Dr. Jeff W. Childers to Memphis to lecture on *The Crux of the Matter*. He, too, supports the view of a “larger community of believers” than is represented by the churches of Christ. *The Crux*, page 151 reads, “By getting rid of the notion that we have to be the best or the only Christians to *be* legitimate Christians, we will be free to reexamine ourselves and our teachings seriously without the nagging fear that we might end up losing our identity. Without the burden of believing ourselves to be the only true Christians, we will be able to participate in and contribute

substantially to the larger conversation among all followers of Christ and learn some things from it without feelings of betrayal.”¹⁰

The “community of believers” cannot be larger than the churches of Christ, and here is why. Believers are “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14). Only the ones obeying the gospel as Peter preached on Pentecost, “. . . Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost,” were added to the church (Acts 2:38, 47). Those added to the church were believers. Therefore, while some outside the church may believe certain aspects of gospel truth, by biblical demonstration they are not considered believers until they have been added to the church by the Lord. There is no “larger community of believers.”

ENDNOTES

¹HUGSR General Catalogue 2001-2002, p. 8.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴Dr. David B. Burks, “From the President,” *Harding* magazine, 8:1 (winter 2000), p. 2.

⁵Since he recently has denied involvement in some places he has visited as guest speaker and to the author at the W.B. West, Jr. Lectures on the campus of the graduate school February 7, 2002, a review of some of the primary sources exposing him is in order (Rom. 16:17-18).

⁶Scott Morris, “The Church in the ‘Hood,” *Harding* magazine, 3:3 (summer 1995), p. 19. Some of those mentioned in this article have written a book titled *Embracing the Poor*, and in the “acknowledgements” they recognize Dean Huffard as their “mentor” in urban missions.

⁷Dr. Evertt W. Huffard, “Meeting the Challenge of Ministry in the 21st Century,” *The Bridge*, 40:6 (November 1999), p. 1.

⁸Ron Cook, “Frayser Mission Church Turns Two,” *The Acts of Highland Street*, 20:20 (May 18, 2001), p. 79.

⁹*Server*, 48:13 (March 28, 2001), p. 2.

¹⁰Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese, *The Crux of the Matter* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2001), p. 151. The Quince Road Church of Christ where Dean Huffard served as an associate minister (1988-1995) currently is using this book as a class book on Sunday morning (*Family Matters*, January 2002, p. 3).