

# A Former Leader Reveals International Churches of Christ Practices

(Part one of three)

by Eugenia M. McGovern

Frustrated, defeated, stressed and emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually drained. These are just a few words that describe my experience as a Zone Leader in the International Churches of Christ (ICC).

As a member from 1995-1998, I saw the emphasis placed on becoming a leader and the special treatment of the leaders that I was instructed to "imitate". I was taught that being a leader was a sign of one's "spirituality" and a "blessings and to grow spiritually, so I naturally set my sights on leadership. I soon discovered that my "serving" in leadership was not a joy, but a burden. I came to resent being in leadership, the extreme demands it placed on my time, time I believed could have been spent actually serving and worshipping God, and the overwhelming amount of pressure placed on me to perform. Ultimately, what I saw, experienced and became, was my undoing in the ICC.

Leadership in the ICC is synonymous with responsibility, and "dying to yourself". Your time is not your own. Zone leaders not only oversee a Zone, which oversee many people, but they usually lead a smaller group called a Bible Talk. Leaders attend meetings, disciple many people, organize different church related activities, and are required to keep several tracking sheets and charts from many recruiting purposes. One is called, "set the example" in "spirituality and relationship with God". "Volunteering", serving in childcare, and collecting money for various reasons are others. While taking care of all these duties, individuals are expected to maintain an ICC acceptable relationship with God, and many work a full time job as I did.

The Zone I co-led, with a male coleader, (men are the only true leaders in the ICC; women can lead groups composed of women only), contained approximately 43 single men and women. The Zone was broken down into 4 Bible Talks (BT), each with a male and female leader. My co-leader and I led one of the BT's and I disciplined

(monitored) one female member of my BT as well as the other 3 female BT leaders. The zone had to sit together at Sunday service and mid-week service and any other meeting of "the body". As leaders, we were thus able to monitor the attendance and behavior of the members, as well as be able to meet and evaluate any "visitors" who were there. Also, by sitting together, leaders were able to get any information from members for "stat" (statistics) sheets and easily gather any monies being collected. As a Zone leader, there was always something to do, some crisis to attend to, and numbers to be turned in.

Much of my time was spent organizing the many activities that always seemed to be going on in the ICC. This was usually done by making many phone calls, placing many demands on my members, with continual follow-up to make sure everything was being carried out according to plan. Everyone in the zone was assigned a specific task and held to that responsibility. We were called to "serve our lead-

ers", and that was certainly held to. Much of this activity required some sort of cost to all members, and money was constantly being collected or spent in regard to these events. Just a few of the activities engaged in included: picnics for Sunday park service including: food for visitors as well as members, birthday parties for members including presents, dinner parties for potential recruits, car washes and garage sales to raise money for church contribution, babysitting and house cleaning for upper leadership, and recruiting drives called "blitzes".

As I mentioned previously, money is a large part of the ICC. In order for the ICC to meet operating costs and continually recruit more members, money is required from all members, and is routinely collected. There are two types of collections required; one is weekly and one annual. The weekly contribution is called just that, and is collected during mid-week services by the Zone and BTL. Each member has agreed upon a certain amount and that amount is listed on the envelope next to the mem-

ber's name that Zone leaders collected from. This collection pays for the salaries of the members on staff, employed full time by the church, as well as daily operational costs. If a member cannot make their contribution, it is up to either the Zone leaders or other members of the group to make up the difference. Members who are habitual in missing their contribution are known, and spoken to by their Zone leader. The second contribution is called "Special Missions" and is collected once a year. Each member is told to give a certain amount, which is multiplied by his or her usual weekly contribution. (For example, one year we told Special Missions would be 14 times your weekly contribution.) It is up to the Zone leaders to seek a commitment from each member of the zone as to what their Special Missions goal would be and plan as to how they were to reach that goal. Lists are made and turned-in to upper leadership with each member's amount pledged. Zone leaders follow up weekly with their members to ensure that money is being put aside toward meeting their goal. If a member is behind or not going to make their goal, it is up to the Zone leader to ensure that a plan is put into place, such as a car wash or garage sale, to help that member make their goal. Zone leaders are in constant contact with the members of their zone and upper leadership monitoring the progress on everyone's Special Missions. Every member is held accountable to meeting their goal, and it is the Zone Leader's responsibility to make sure their members meet their commitment.

Zone leaders are also expected to attend many meetings of all kinds and to turn over what are called "stat" sheets to upper leadership. These meetings and sheets are ways the ICC closely monitors it leaders' progress and performance as well as its members.

In the next newsletter, I will go into detail about these tracking charts, some recruiting tactics, what is discussed during these leadership meetings and what is expected from members. Together, by taking a close look at the ICC, the demands placed on the members and pressure placed on leaders, we can learn more about their practices, and ultimately expose them for what they are.

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