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## Journey of a Lifetime?

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The title above was (in part) the title given to an article in the June issue of the *Christian Chronicle*. The actual title read “Journey of a Lifetime One Way.” After reading this article, one having even a basic Bible understanding would have to ask “which way?” or “who’s way?”

It was the early sixties and the Northeast was in need of strong faithful soldiers of Christ (and still is) and many in the South were ready and willing to go. Many who were Christians during this time may have heard of or have memories of this great migration north to plant or establish ready-made congregations of the Lord’s church. This migration to the north was called “The Exodus Movement.” This writer has little doubt that this effort was born out of good and pure hearts that loved God and had a burning desire to save souls. This movement received national coverage from *Time* and *Newsweek*, as well as *The Wall Street Journal*.

There were two congregations featured in the *Chronicle*. One was the Garretson Road church of Christ in Bridgewater, NJ. Brother Glenn Garth, an elder of this congregation says “The congregations embraces ethnic and cultural diversity while remaining true to traditional church of Christ principles.” Those who saw the need and sacrificed many things over forty years ago would be encouraged to hear and be a part of this congregation. In fact, six original families still remain as members today.

The second congregation featured brings great sadness to this writer and ought to bring sadness to all who love the Lord and His church as well. In 1966, fifty-five families made their way to Stamford Connecticut. It was here that many tirelessly labored to grow the Lord’s church. But just like many congregations of today, Stamford now desires to “pervert the Gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7) and have things their own way, departing from **the** faith (Eph. 4:5), “giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1). The article about the Stamford congregation and their teachings was laid out into four sections. I wish now to touch upon each of them very briefly.

## THEN AND NOW

Stamford's pulpit minister Dale Pauls is a graduate of Harding University School of Religion who came to Stamford in 1978. When Pauls came to Stamford, only one original family remained. They have since left. Do you wonder why? This writer cannot know for sure, but from reading the article, it would not surprise me in the least if it was because of the ungodly teachings and practices of this body. Both Pauls and the elders acknowledge that some founding members might not approve of the direction the congregation has taken. While the singing remains *a capella*, the Lord's supper is observed each Lord's day and baptism is still taught as an essential part of salvation, other things have changed. After what the leadership calls "*an exhaustive, years-long biblical study*," the congregation has removed ALL restrictions on women and now allows them to serve in leadership roles. "*We do not restrict roles or assign privilege or status on the basis of birth.*" Women in this congregation are now able to serve as deacons and also as elders. Yes, that's right, deacons and elders! Can you imagine it? An **EXHAUSTIVE BIBLICAL** study brought these brethren to an understanding that God really does not mean that the holders of these offices need to be the "*husband of one wife*" (1 Tim. 3:2,12; Titus 1:16). "*From my view and interpretation of Scripture, I think it's the same church*" Pauls said. Right!

## A DREAM REALIZED

One of the men that helped to organize the Exodus Movement to Stamford and also served as its first minister was Jim Pounders. Pounders is the alumni association director at Lipscomb University in Nashville, TN. When Pounders went back to worship with this congregation in 2001 he said, "*What is thrilling to us is that the church has become what we dreamed that it would be.*" Thought, having women read Scripture and serve on the Lord's table did make him "*a little uncomfortable.*" This brother "felt" uncomfortable, but later said "*But we know the church did an exhaustive study of the practice before employing it in their worship, so we respect their study and their autonomy.*"

## AN OPEN BOOK

Edward Pleasant is the “music minister” for this congregation. He said, “*I am grateful that people took the risk of coming here...to start this work. We stand on all their shoulders, and hopefully people who come after us will be inspired to go even further to be the Lord’s church.*” The Lord’s church? Hello! Pleasant further says, “*We just say, we’re going to open these bibles...and see what God’s word has to say.*” This writer asks, “Then what? Do as the leadership ‘views’ or ‘interprets’ it?” Pleasant says that they believe in an “*open mind and open book,*” but again, this writer wonders what book they are reading from. It certainly is not God’s book!

#### A LITTLE UNITED NATIONS

The Stamford congregation has a great mix of people from many parts of the world. There are also many who have their roots in denominationalism. This explains the desire of the minister (Dale Pauls) to facilitate the Stamford Clergy Association as well as serve as president-elect of an inter-faith council. In other words, don’t stand for the right, but rather blend in or “*fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*” (Eph. 5:11; see also Jn. 3:19-21; 2 Jn. 1:10-11).

Dale Pauls shows his gratitude to those who began this great work forty years ago by saying “*No doubt, theological differences will keep a number of people involved in the Exodus Movement away from the anniversary celebration. They may feel betrayed...but we didn’t owe them our souls...we still had to follow where the Word and Spirit led us.*” Right!