

Why are you publishing this?

Because the Network needs to change and its leaders need to repent and reform the organization and seek reconciliation with those they've hurt.

While the Network will sometimes claim itself to be a loose affiliation of churches held together by relationships, I do not believe that to be an honest and accurate representation of what the Network is. It is a quasi-denomination, an organization composed of member organizations akin to a hub and spokes.

That organization is led by a president and a Network Leadership team.

The Network president, Steve Morgan, has been the subject of some great concern in the past several years. He has a complex history including some dark sin from before he was a Christian and before he was a pastor. Many have expressed great concern over this. Others have expressed concern over when, how, and to whom he confessed and revealed this history. I'm among those who are concerned that Steve dishonestly hid his sin in order to achieve his objectives. When someone who knew of his history confronted him and the Network with it, he was dishonest in how he responded to and handled the information as it came out.

I believe that this dishonesty disqualifies him from the office of elder / overseer in a church. While I had no authority or influence to disqualify him from his position at a local church, I was an overseer / elder at a Network church and I believe I had a responsibility to ensure that our Network leaders met the qualifications for overseer / elder.

The Network leadership has maintained a remarkable degree of silence on these matters, essentially publishing only one statement to members. Without much information from them, I was left to gather it from other sources. To compile the information and my thoughts on the matter, I wrote a "brief" on the subject in early August 2022.

Evaluating Steve Morgan's Truthfulness

This is an effort to evaluate whether Steve Morgan is qualified under the biblical qualifications for a pastor, elder, overseer. This is not an evaluation of whether he is qualified with respect to his actions leading to criminal charges against him in the 1980's for sexual assault of a minor. While reasonable people can disagree about that, I have concluded for myself that he is not automatically, permanently disqualified by those actions. He may remain disqualified because of it, but that is not automatic, permanent, nor is it the subject of this evaluation.

Likewise, this is not an evaluation of whether he is qualified with respect to the fact that he did not universally, publicly disclose his conduct which led to the criminal charges against him in the 1980's.

It is furthermore not an evaluation of whether he is disqualified by his failure to disclose his history of being arrested for and charged with criminal sodomy against a minor.

Most narrowly, this is an evaluation of whether he has been honest for the last several years about this.

To begin, the starting assumptions are what I understand Steve Morgan to have said privately. That in or around 1986 or 1987, Steve had unlawful sexual conduct with an underage boy. At the time, Steve was 22 and the boy was 15. So far as it has been relayed to me, Steve was a youth group leader in a Latter Day Saints organization. Steve was then arrested and charged with aggravated criminal sodomy against a minor in Kansas - a felony charge. Steve and the prosecutor completed a diversion agreement whereby Steve agreed to do certain things to avoid full prosecution.

At some point later Steve became a Christian. He started attending church. He

[Evaluating-Steve-Morgans-Truthfulness-1](#)

Download

Note that the above is a finalized version of the document; there was an earlier, preliminary version of this that held the conclusions much more tentatively, hoping for additional information.

I shared this information with the other two overseers / elders in my local church, both of whom were and still are good friends of mine. We had a long meeting wherein we discussed the matters addressed in the brief. We came to the conclusion that the right next step was to ask the Network Leadership to conduct an impartial investigation into whether Steve Morgan was truthful as this situation unfolded since 2020.



August 29, 2022

Network Leadership Team,

Together, the board of overseers of South Grove Church writes to urge you to swiftly commission a prompt independent investigation into the qualifications of Steve Morgan as an overseer in the church. We have carefully reviewed the claims that have been levied by former members and leaders of network churches, as well as the statements made by several individuals involved in Steve's ordination and the authorization and establishment of Vine Church when Steve planted it many years ago. It is our hope to see a thorough independent investigation from a third party exonerate Steve. Nevertheless, there are significant concerns about his qualifications that deserve independent investigation.

We believe and reaffirm that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Steve can be forgiven – and we believe that he has been forgiven – for the sin which has been publicly exposed over the last several months. Even so, an independent investigation would help to alleviate concerns, and would likely serve to gather recommendations on good, affirmative steps to assure visitors and members of our churches of their safety and the safety of children.

We still do not have a clear account of who knew about this matter, what they knew, and when they knew it. We have serious concerns about whether Steve met the level of forthrightness that members and leaders of a church should expect from an overseer. In particular, there are key differences in Steve Morgan's and Steve Nicholson's accounts, and we believe it is important to have this disparity investigated and analyzed by someone with independent judgment.

An independent investigation is necessary to evaluate whether Steve Morgan is qualified for the role of overseer in a church and to serve as a leader in the network. The network leadership team has indicated that it has been considering whether an independent investigation should be done, and if so, who should conduct the investigation. With the recent events and what appear to be troubling inconsistencies, the need for an independent investigation is both amplified and made more urgent.

To that end, we are requesting that the network leadership team promptly agree that a swift independent investigation is necessary, and within the next 10 days pledge to commission the investigation by hiring a firm to do so within 45 days. We propose that the scope of the independent investigation be to evaluate and make recommendations about whether Steve Morgan satisfies the qualifications for an overseer with

[384135CD-B0E1-45C0-BAD5-FD4E11E5B201](#)

Download

We heard back the next day that the Network Leadership team would not be commissioning an investigation.

It seemed as though this was going to cause South Grove Church to leave the Network. Through a series of events that will be described elsewhere, that did not happen, and instead the lead pastor of South Grove elected to keep South Grove in the Network. This led to the other two overseers (including me) resigning, since we were unwilling to follow Steve Morgan and the Network Leadership team after this, and especially unwilling to lead the people of South Grove in following the Network Leadership in this.

I addressed this matter directly with the Network Leadership team, pointing out to them that I believe their position on this to not only be unwise, but also to be sinful. Though I confronted them with this directly, including taking with me additional witnesses to the correspondence, the Network Leadership team has not responded to me substantively.

So, the most specific reason about why I'm publishing this is to follow Matthew 18. Having gone to these brothers directly and gotten no response, and having gone with two additional witnesses and gotten no response, it is now time to "take it to the Church."

Here is what I wrote to the Network Leadership team shortly after my resignation:

Steve, Tony, Sándor, James, and Luke,

I have never met most of you, and I imagine that only one of you knows who I am. Nevertheless, I'm writing to share my grief over and profound disappointment in your actions and decisions, an explanation about my resignation from the Board of Overseers at South Grove Church, and why we will not be attending any church that is part of the network. My hope is that it will lead you to reconsider your decisions, your approach, and to repent. It will not change my decision to resign - the damage is done and the trust broken.

I'm attaching a document that I wrote as I was organizing my thoughts on the revelations of the last several months. This letter will not re-tread that territory, since it is handled thoroughly in the attachment. We did not include the attached document (or anything like it) with our request for an independent investigation, in part to keep it short and simple, and in another part not to prejudice you against our request. Nevertheless, I want you to know why I joined in the call for an independent investigation. The version that I'm attaching has been edited from the version that I was working with in August 2022 when we wrote to request that you commission an impartial investigation into Steve's honesty for the last several years as events unfolded. The main changes are that before we asked and you refused to commission an independent investigation, I labored hard to keep an open mind, to remain persuadable, and to hold out hope that my analysis would change based on such an investigation. Since you have refused, I have revised it, as you have not offered and I no longer hold out hope of being presented with information that would change my analysis. Please consider it carefully, especially as context for why we called for an investigation and why I'm writing this letter.

I am deeply, personally wounded and grieved by your decision not to help me and South Grove Church in response to our request for an independent investigation. As I understand it, you have given three primary reasons: 1) the emotional toll that it would take on the network leadership team, 2) that there is no Biblical example of this kind of independent investigation, and 3) that you don't feel Jesus' leading in it. I'll address these in reverse order.

With respect to the assertion that you "don't feel Jesus' leading in it," I am sharply skeptical of this. Our local board *does* feel Jesus' leading in pursuing an investigation, and that's why we asked for it. It is very difficult for an outsider to your closely-knit inner circle, like me, to observe this situation and avoid a conclusion something like this: "Steve and his inner circle of long-time close friends, all of whom Steve is responsible for raising to leadership, prayed about it and say they heard from God exactly the conclusion that they wanted - not to investigate their dear friend and leader." Sometimes we pray about things and hear exactly the conclusion we want, and in those situations I think we do well to be mindful of our prejudices, preferences, and implicit biases. Even as I began composing this on Wednesday, September 21, 2022, I stumbled upon this

[2022.9.26-Jasons-Letter-to-NLT](#)

Download

I've redacted some of the specifics related to the wrongdoing of one particular person. Thankfully, that matter was resolved by a genuine apology, and need not be widely circulated with a name attached to it. I left the general content of it in the letter because the phenomenon is not unique to me, and others have been told – wrongly – that having concerns about this situation is "a great offense to the cross" or "denying the power of the cross."

The Network needs to change, and that change needs to start with its leaders.

Instead of self-protection, they must recalibrate to self-sacrifice.

Instead of overbearing, heavy-handed leadership (like accusations like "denying the power of the cross" or doing "great offense to the cross" by having concerns about the qualification of leaders), they need to lead gently, kindly, and with humility.

Instead of opacity, they must show transparency.

Instead of absolute, complete deference to and defense of one another, they must be willing to hold one another accountable for living lives characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. They must hold one another accountable to the qualifications for overseers / elders.

Instead of partiality, they must show impartiality.

They must change. They must repent. The Network must be reformed.