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Abede v. Christian Church

For many years, Rev. Kebede was the Senior Pastor of Christian Church of Addis Ababa, a large church with a congregation of over 5,000. He was a very popular pastor who got along well with congregation members. Unfortunately, despite its size, the church struggled financially and was not able to meet the day to day needs. A number of staff members had to be let go and programs reduced in size, in particular, some of the more popular ones, such as the Youth Group and Women's Ministry. Although they appreciated his abilities as pastor, the Board of Elders became increasingly frustrated with Kebede's lack of attention to financial concerns. Kebede told the Board he believed that finances should be left in God's hands and that He would provide. The Board, on the other hand, believed that Kebede needed to take a more active role by approaching wealthier members to increase their contributions to Christian Church and by preaching on topics such as "stewardship." Kebede refused the Board's advice.

About three years ago, the Board invited Rev. Abebe to fill in as a guest preacher while Rev. Kebede was out of town. Abede was a well-known Christian speaker who had gained an international following. In his sermon, Abede told of how the Lord had blessed him, how he travelled all over the world as a speaker and an evangelist, and how his strong international connections had made him a very successful fund raiser. Over the next few months, the Board invited Abede to serve several more times as the Guest Preacher. Abede continued to fill his sermons with stories of how God had used him to reach out to thousands of believers and to raise a remarkable amount of financial support. After lengthy discussion at a Board meeting, the Elders of Christian church decided that Abebe would be the perfect person to serve as Senior Pastor to turn around Christian Church's increasingly severe financial condition. They realized that Rev. Kebede would not respond well to this decision, so they decided to create a new position for him at Christian Church.

Rev. Abede gladly accepted the Elders invitation and, two years ago, became Senior Pastor. But, Kebede refused what he saw as a "demotion" and resigned from Christian Church.

Abede turned out to be a brilliant fund raiser and, at first, was a popular preacher. As promised, he brought in funds. Ministries were restored and staff was added. But, after one year, serious divisions arose within the Board of Elders, the staff, and the congregation. Abebe, it turned out, was not good at being a pastor. He didn't care for the congregation as they were accustomed under Pastor Kebede. In fact, Abede was frequently away from Addis Ababa, travelling the world raising funds. When he returned home, he made hasty

decisions, appointing and dismissing people or creating new programs as he wished, often based on a superficial assessment, rather than on a deep understanding of circumstances. As a result, the staff and Elders experienced a great deal of turmoil. They could not be sure from one month to the next who would come and who or what would go. This confusion spilled over into the congregation itself.

At first, the Board of Elders was so pleased with the improved finances that they accepted his 'dictatorship' out of fear of offending him. But, sometime later, congregation members became tired of the contention and left the church. Several members of the Board also resigned.

Realizing they had arrived at a crisis point, three months ago the remaining Board members convened a General Assembly of Christian Church and called for a new election. The General Assembly reinstated the former Board of Elders, including those who had resigned. The first act of the new Board was to dismiss Abebe. The Board is considering whether to ask Rev. Kebede to return.

Rev. Abebe was shocked by the Board's decision. Until he received word of his dismissal, he had no idea his position was in jeopardy. He has decided to sue the church, charging that the Board of Elders dismissed him without notice. What is more, he intends to begin a new church and plans to take with him the donors he brought to Christian Church. Some in the congregation support him and are thinking of leaving Christian Church to help plant Abede's new church. Compounding matters, the Board learned that the vehicle bought for the Church is registered in Abede's name. In addition, several Christian Church bank accounts are in Abede's name, as well as a parcel of land in the Akaki area, where Abede has decided to construct the new church building. When asked why he did this, Abede replied that the many new donors he had recruited supported him personally, not Christian Church, and that the money, the land, and the car were rightfully his. In fact, he added, the Church should be grateful that it is in a much better financial status than when he first arrived.