



LARRY MCCOIRICK

Writing a Wrong

Keith Stewart
with the
explosive ad.

A church's confession whips up a storm.

When Springcreek Church of Garland, Texas, ran a full-page ad in *The Dallas Morning News* headlined, "We Were Wrong," the vigorous reaction shattered expectations.

The local TV station sent a camera, *The Dallas Morning News* ran a story, TV director and author David Burchett blogged, and fiery AIDS activist David Miller called to congratulate the church.

So what was the big deal? Underneath the headline, the ad copy ran: "We live in the land of plenty, denying ourselves nothing, while ignoring our neighbors who actually have nothing. We sat on the sidelines doing nothing while AIDS ravaged Africa."

Springcreek senior pastor Keith Stewart says the line about Africa was prompted after church members joined a World Vision trip to Katito—an AIDS-devastated region in central Kenya. Afterward, church members were so moved that they began sponsoring more than 500 children in the community to improve their nutrition, health, and education.

The church also became more active locally in the high-crime, low-income neighborhood of Glynnhill, assisting elderly people and single moms and cleaning up rubbish-strewn parks and alleyways.

Despite the good works, Keith says he felt God prompting him to apologize for former times when the church was preoccupied with serving itself rather than others. "Jesus said the gospel is first and foremost good news to the poor. We were not that," he says.

"I really felt the ad was the best way to tell the community we were wrong, because the people we have hurt are all outside the church."

In response, one blogger wrote: "I wish more churches and their congregations would think this way, then maybe the wounded sheep (including myself) would venture back in."

There were some negative reactions, mostly from Christians complaining about wasting money on the ad. But Keith says that had the church spent the money on a self-serving promotion, nobody would have objected.

He feels the ad touched a raw nerve because Springcreek has not been alone in its neglect of the poor. "When something gets close enough to convict, then people either confess it or find a way to invalidate it," he says. ■

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— KEITH STEWART, *Springcreek Senior Pastor*