

2 March 2007
Chicago, Illinois

To the Dear Saints who Meet with the Church in Chicago:

Hello to you all. I do miss you, as I have not been meeting with the church since October, when I was told by the elders not to come to the meetings any longer. Since that time, however, and especially in recent days, the situation of the church and of the saints has been very much on my heart. I do feel that I have been “bereaved of you for a little while, in presence, not in heart” (1 Thessalonians 2:17), and I truly long for your fellowship.

I want to make it clear that I have not broken off fellowship with anyone; I believe some of you may have this impression. (I should say that although my name has been removed from the church phone list, I was not aware of that until after it happened.) To the contrary, I am more than willing to come together with any saints, especially if you are concerned that I have left what I have stood for these many years, to thoroughly discuss my situation, that of the church here, and of the churches in general. I don't believe that I have changed, but rather that I have been put out because I have refused to change.

I first touched the church when I picked up a *Harvest* newspaper in a grocery store and visited the church in Hanover Park; that was in February of 1984, exactly 23 years ago. I was caught in the first meeting I ever attended, when I saw—I believe for the first time—the saints in the corporate enjoyment of Christ. I would not have been able to express it so clearly then, but what I really saw was something of the testimony of Christ and of His one Body. As we know, God's blessing shall always rest on this (Psalm 133).

In the fall of that year I moved to one of the apartments above the bookstore so that I could participate, along with nine other brothers from the Chicago area, in the one-year labor with brother Titus. That was my first real experience of the church life in Chicago. After that labor I moved back to Hanover Park, and eventually attended the Full-Time Training in Taipei in 1987. In the spring of 1988 I moved to Evanston, and from that time until last October I met and served with the church in Chicago. I served on a full-time basis from November of 1997 until June of last year.

I mention this to remind you that, like so many of us, my involvement with the church in Chicago is not superficial, but rather is a substantial and very integral part of my life. Yet what governs my life is not my attachment to the church here, but my commitment to the testimony of Christ that the church is commissioned to bear—to see the saints brought into the enjoyment of Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ in the genuine local churches.

Therefore, when it became clear to me that the church in Chicago was no longer standing for the testimony of Christ alone, but was now also standing as the testimony of a particular ministry, I felt compelled to speak out and attempt to warn you concerning this matter, to remind you that “God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9), not into the fellowship of any ministry.

The saints should know that, even though no one else in the Chicago area has spoken out publicly, I am by no means the only one who has this concern. Actually, a number of other saints who have met with and served with the church for very many years have, in the past year or so, concluded that they could not in good conscience do so any longer. This is because they, too, feel that church in Chicago has changed its standing. In addition, I know of at least some others who, while they continue to meet with the church, are deeply troubled regarding the current situation.

I would, therefore, remind you again concerning our need to stand for Christ alone, by referring to Paul's word to the believers in Corinth:

It has been made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of the household of Chloe, that there are strifes among you. Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. (1 Cor. 1:11-12).

Brother Lee writes concerning these verses:

This is exactly the same as saying "I am a Lutheran," "I am a Wesleyan," "I am a Presbyterian," "I am an Episcopalian," "I am a Baptist," etc. All such designations should be condemned and rejected. They can be eliminated and terminated only by taking Christ as the unique center among all the believers (Recovery Version of the New Testament, p. 682).

Why is there so much turmoil among us in these days? It is because some now insist on saying, "I am of the blending brothers," and indeed the church in Chicago as a whole has taken this standing. Such an attitude will always lead to division and all its attendant evils—suspicions, enmity, slanders, contentions, and other such things. Dear saints, it is this that is damaging the church life in Chicago, not the fact that I and some others have stood against this trend. I have been very impressed lately by this passage in Acts:

And certain men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. And when no little dissension and discussion with them came about through Paul and Barnabas... (Acts 15:1-2).

In other words, when certain ones told the believers they needed to be circumcised, it was Paul and Barnabas who brought in the "dissension and discussion" to oppose such a thing.

Today no one would tell us we need to be circumcised—yet we do have ones coming among us who seek to bring in another form of circumcision, that is, a test of fellowship beyond what the New Testament allows. They claim that we can only have one group of brothers minister among us or else we cannot be included in the fellowship of the churches; indeed, even now some churches in the Midwest are being cut off from the fellowship and attacked for this very reason. This is blatant sectarianism, and if we allow it to come into our church life "the truth of the gospel" cannot remain with us (Gal. 2:5). Watchman Nee stated:

What havoc has been wrought in the Church because so many of her ministers have sought to bring the churches under their ministry, rather than by their ministry serve the churches. As soon as the churches are brought under any ministry, they cease to be local and become sectarian (The Normal Christian Church Life, pp.138-139).

Saints, do you really believe that the solution to our problems is to insist that all the churches be in the “seven feasts,” use the same morning revival materials, and have publications and ministry from only one group of brothers? This kind of oneness is absolutely sectarian, such as any denomination might have, and thus to take this way would be to forsake our testimony to the unique oneness of the Body of Christ. Rather, we must come out of these things and let the saints and the churches participate or not as they feel led of the Lord. In the Body, as brother Lee states above, the problem of division

...can be eliminated and terminated only by taking Christ as the unique center among all the believers.

In contrast, whenever we insist on minor things they simply become “children’s toys” for us to play with (cf. Ephesians 4:14, and RcV. fn. 1 on that verse.) In 1983 Benson Phillips, a leading one among the blending brothers, stated this so well in his foreword to brother Lee’s book, *The Speciality, Generality, and Practicality of the Church Life*:

When the Body of Christ is divided, it loses everything; yet it has been divided again and again, mainly due to the over-emphasis of certain beliefs other than those comprising the faith. Beliefs other than those comprising the faith have much disagreement and disputation. These beliefs may even become winds of teaching (Eph. 4:14) blowing us away from the oneness of the faith (Eph. 4:13).

Concerning the faith we must be very specific and particular (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 6:12); however, concerning the other things we must follow Paul’s example and be general, never insisting that others believe as we do (Rom. 14:1- 8). To possess such a spirit of generality is the generality of the church life. If we are special and insist on anything other than the common faith, the oneness will surely be damaged, and divisions will occur....

If only the blending brothers would practice this word! May the Lord grant us His mercy to recover the church life here in Chicago out of any sectarian practices and back to Himself as our unique center! And may He grant all the saints His grace to stand firmly, even immovably, at whatever cost, for the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ.

Anyone who desires to fellowship with me about this letter and the concerns it raises may reach me via email at dvdcnfld@gmail.com.

Your brother in Christ, David Canfield