

## **A Response to the Open Letter of Affirmation from Brothers in the Midwest of the United States and Canada**

David Canfield • 18 March 2007

At the beginning of January an “Open Letter” was made public which was signed by leading brothers in about thirty churches throughout the Midwest. For the most part this letter was an endorsement of the “Warning Statement” issued by the blended brothers in October, in which they urged the saints to excommunicate (as they said, “quarantine”) brother Titus Chu and his co-workers from the fellowship of the churches. The signers included most of the leading brothers in the Chicago metro area, except for those of the church in Naperville; the full text is available at [AFaithFulWord.com](http://AFaithFulWord.com).

It is important that the saints understand what this letter states, not only because it is an official statement of the church here, but especially because the ground that it takes is very different from that which we have always stood on. Specifically, it contains this statement:

*We are being spiritually supplied by the unique New Testament ministry.*

In this statement “the unique New Testament ministry” refers exclusively to the ministry of the blended brothers. The “Warning Statement” itself, which the brothers’ “Open Letter” endorses, confirms this by saying:

*The entire ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee...is the New Testament ministry.*

Since the blended brothers frequently assert that their ministry is the continuation of Witness Lee’s ministry, what they are really saying is this: *today, their ministry is the New Testament ministry.*

They do not just say that their ministry is according to the New Testament ministry. Nor do they claim just to have a share in the New Testament ministry, and that today others besides themselves may also partake of that ministry among the churches; rather, *they want the saints to believe that today God has committed to them the exclusive ministry to be exercised among the churches.*

Moreover, this claim they make for themselves is not just a matter of theory; to the contrary, its practical application is already having a horribly destructive impact on our church life.

Based upon it, the blended brothers are very actively working to exclude any others from ministering among the churches. This was the thrust of their “Publication Work” statement in 2005 which said publications for use among the churches should have their approval; it is why they have excommunicated brother Titus Chu; and it is why they are now working to isolate brother Dong in South America. The effect of all this on the churches has been disastrous, resulting in the divisions and turmoil currently among us.

Now, with their "Open Letter" of affirmation, the leading ones here in Chicago have officially endorsed this view. In so doing they have made the church in Chicago largely a sect of the blended brothers and Living Stream Ministry, regardless of what we claim the church still stands for. This was the reason I referred, in my recent open letter to the saints in Chicago, to Paul's word to the believers in Corinth about claiming to be "of" someone. He fully condemned such a practice, as brother Lee also does in his note on these verses:

*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).*

*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. (Recovery Version of the New Testament, p. 682).*

Saints, just as Paul condemned such a thing in his day, we must reject it today if we are to clearly stand as the church here for the unique and genuine oneness of the Body of Christ. As brother Lee goes on to point out, designations such as this "can be eliminated and terminated only by taking Christ as the unique center among all the believers." Surely this is what God desires for us today, not a man-made, sectarian kind of oneness.

It is difficult to see how any sober-minded group of brothers could believe, let alone proclaim to others, that God would commit His entire New Testament ministry to them. One is reminded of another word the apostle wrote to the Corinthians:

*We do not dare to class or compare ourselves with any of those who commend themselves; but they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding (2 Cor. 10:12).*

Moreover, it should also be pointed out that the blended brothers' view of their ministry explicitly contradicts the thought of brother Lee:

*When we say that the new covenant ministry is unique, we do not mean that it is the ministry of only one person. For example, it is slanderous to accuse me of saying that the unique ministry today is the ministry of Witness Lee. We do not say this, and we do not mean this. By the unique ministry, the new covenant ministry, we mean the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. Whoever ministers the Spirit and righteousness to others is one in the unique ministry, no matter who he may be. Peter, John, James, Paul, Timothy, Titus, Apollos—they all had the one ministry. The ministers are many, but the ministry is unique. As long as you minister the Spirit and righteousness to others, you are in this unique ministry.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> *Life-study of 2 Corinthians*, Message 27, pp.235-236, emphasis added. Messages 26 and 27 of this Life-study provide a very clear explanation of the unique New Testament ministry.

Originally, the church in Chicago stood for the oneness of the Body of Christ. We realized that we had been called into “the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9), not into the fellowship of a particular ministry. We were one with all the believers, and claimed that we did not cut ourselves off from any other saints, regardless of their particular beliefs.

Now, however, we only accept into fellowship those churches which declare their loyalty to the blended brothers. Specifically, we have cut off fellowship with those churches in the Midwest, with whom we have grown up spiritually for over three decades, that are standing against the efforts of the blended brothers to subvert the stand of the churches.

This change in the church in Chicago’s actual practice is well illustrated by some of the signatures attached to the “Open Letter,” which clearly demonstrate a setting aside of the genuine local authority whenever that authority does not submit to the blended brothers:

1. All 12 of the brothers from Columbus who signed it, thus claiming to speak on behalf of the church in Columbus as “Elders and Responsible Brothers,” have in fact been put out of that church for being divisive. (In fact, the church in Columbus and its actual leadership fully rejects the “Warning Statement.”)
2. In two cases—the church in Naperville and the church in Ann Arbor—brothers signed the letter when the leadership of the church in their locality was not in agreement about the proper course of action to take.
3. The brother who signed the letter claiming to represent the church in Naperville is not and has never been in the leadership of the church there. Moreover, the church there as a whole does not endorse the “Warning Statement.”

The acceptance of such signatures on this document is horribly divisive and no doubt very troubling to the saints in these churches; to say the least, it is ironic that the “Open Letter” claims it was issued

*To affirm and testify of the unique oneness of the organic Body of Christ  
and of all the churches that express the Body on the earth.*

Saints, we should not attempt to simply ignore the real situation of the church in Chicago. The purpose of my sending this out is to help you understand what that situation is, so that you may more clearly realize how to stand firmly for the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ. May the Lord lead us all.

Your brother in Christ, David Canfield