

The Great Lakes Brothers' Fourth Letter

TO: Brothers Benson Phillips & Liu Suey

FROM: Paul Neider, Nigel Tomes, James Yang & Vern Yoder

CC.: Brothers in the Great Lakes Area

DATE: September 10, 2006

Dear brothers,

We acknowledge the receipt of your "personal letter" (dated August 10, 2006) which was sent to a subset of the brothers from the Great Lakes area who wrote three previous letters to the 21 "blended co-workers." We wish to give a brief response. Before doing so, we want to assure you the contents of those letters were thoroughly fellowshipped by all those who signed.

1. Your letter ignores the fact that this correspondence was initiated in response to the letter (dated June 4, 2005) from 21 "blended co-workers" to Brother Titus Chu. That letter directed Brother Titus to stop his publication work and leave "the continuation of his previous work"—including "the churches under [his] ministry"—"to the fellowship of [your] coordinated oversight." Three letters were written by groups of Great Lakes brothers (dated June 12, Sept. 24, 2005 and Feb. 28, 2006) out of concern for the serious repercussions these demands would have upon the saints and local churches which we serve. Many of these local churches were raised up or built up through Brother Titus' labor. We know that Brother Titus has repeatedly asked for times of fellowship and prayer with you. However, to date these requests have been repeatedly spurned. The underlying message of your letter, seems to be—Brothers, forget about everything, come back to our blending and be under the ministry of the "blended co-workers" at the seven annual feasts, then everything will be OK. To this we respond—Brothers, as long as this issue among the senior workers in the Lord's recovery—your attempt to marginalize Brother Titus Chu's ministry and labor—remains unresolved, we cannot simply proceed with "business as usual."
2. Your letter disregards the distinct body of systematic teaching developed by the "blended co-workers" over the past decade. You say, "We all believe and have received the same one faith...we all recognize...many crucial matters in the Lord's recovery...we all should have the same mind in these matters." This is true. However, in our view, the current problems in the Lord's recovery do not stem from any difference in the essential items of the faith nor any divergence in the governing vision of God's economy. Rather a major causal factor is that recently the "blended co-workers" have developed a systematic teaching, beyond these essential items, including:
 - One unique Minister of the Age, most recently, Brother Witness Lee
 - One unique wise master-builder who is the 'acting God,' supervising God's building work on the whole globe,
 - One unique continuation of the Minister of the Age-Master-builder (the "blended co-workers"),
 - One global band (or company) of workers,
 - One publication, "*all the saints and all the churches everywhere should...be restricted in one publication in the Lord's recovery.*" [Publication Work in the Lord's Recovery]

These teachings and their application by the "blended co-workers" are the root cause of serious problems in the recovery. We recognize that some of these items were mentioned by Brother Lee, and may perhaps be beneficial as "inspirations" in particular instances. However, they do not represent items of our "essential beliefs," based upon the Scriptures and the ministry of brothers Nee and Lee as presented in The Beliefs & Practices.... (1978) and Brother Lee's Speciality, Generality & Practicality... Nevertheless, under the "blended co-workers'" ministry, these "non-essential teachings" have been insisted upon to the extent that they have become non-negotiable items in the Lord's recovery. Your latest letter contains no acknowledgment that this is a source of difficulty in the recovery. Once again, dear Brother Benson, we remind

you of your own "prophetic" word of warning: "**If we are special and insist on anything other than the common faith, the oneness will surely be damaged, and divisions will occur.**" (Benson Phillips, Preface to, Speciality, Generality & Practicality...). Yet, haven't you and the other "blended co-workers" made the items mentioned above essential, non-negotiable items? Aren't you insisting upon them to the extent that they are part of the constitution of the recovery?

3. You fail to acknowledge the serious concerns raised in the Great Lakes brothers' previous letters. These include the following matters:

- The use of the LSM podium to attack churches and activities in this area
- The interchangeable use of "the ministry" to mean the New Testament ministry, Brother Lee's ministry & the Living Stream Ministry.
- The elevation of LSM above its Levitical role – a business office publishing and distributing both W. Nee's and W. Lee's books, tapes, etc.
- The tendency towards uniformity and conformity, including your emphasis that "**interpretational differences prove that some...are not under the Head.**"
- Your rejection of our request for fellowship, asserting "**The Acts 15 fellowship you requested [has] already taken place.**"
- Your failure to fulfill the "Phoenix Accord" of February, 2003. Your failure to explain why you abrogated the "Phoenix Accord"
- Your unilateral termination of the fellowship@coworkers.net facility, Oct. 2005
- Your use of the podium, the printing press, and the web-cast to propagate your "one publication" doctrine, deprecate alternative viewpoints and prejudice the saints against the ministry and publications of Brother Titus Chu, Brother Dong and others.
- Your exclusive definition of the Body—"the Body equals the recovery"

In summary, the Great Lakes brothers' second letter said, "We are concerned that while you are teaching one flow, you may be producing conformity; as you are stressing oneness, you may be producing only uniformity in outward practices; while you are emphasizing fellowship, you may be just exercising control; and as you are speaking about the organic Body, you may be actually establishing a global organization." (Great Lakes brothers, September 24, 2005)

Their third letter elaborated on these points. In particular the Great Lakes brothers questioned your teaching concerning the Body—an item you have made the centerpiece of your ministry. The "blended co-workers" are on record as equating the Body of Christ with those believers within the Lord's recovery—"the Body equals the recovery" [*The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, p. 196] We regard this exclusive definition of the Body, embodied in the phrase—"the Body equals the recovery"—as contrary both to the Scriptures and the ministries of Brothers Nee and Lee. By this definition, aren't you excluding millions of genuine believers from the Body? Yet, this concept appears to underlie much of your teaching on this crucial topic. This point has been raised repeatedly by brothers among us, yet you have turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to this matter and others listed above. To date these issues have not been meaningfully addressed by any of the "blended co-workers."

Moreover we fear the "blended co-workers'" teaching is becoming even more exclusive, as evidenced by brother Ron Kangas' speaking during the last LSM training. It seems brother Ron's definition of the Body includes only LSM's "blended co-workers" and those who are "one" with them. [*The Ministry*, Vol. 10, No. 4, July 2006, p. 208] Moreover, it seems that your definition of the "fellowship of the Body" corresponds to your exclusive definition of "**the Body equals the recovery.**" Doesn't brother Ron's definition of the "fellowship of the Body" as the "fellowship of the local churches," suggest the Lord's recovery has proprietary rights over the fellowship of Christ's universal Body? [*The Ministry*, Vol. 10, No. 4, July 2006, pp. 210-11] The believers in the local churches represent a small percentage of all genuine believers. How then can you justify

such an exclusive definition, equating the "fellowship of the Body" with the "fellowship of the local churches"? Doesn't this definition exclude millions of genuine believers from the fellowship of the Body?

Many brothers feel that Brother Ron's exposition of leprosy in the house, at the LSM training, [*The Ministry*, Vol. 10, No. 4, July 2006, pp. 210-13] and the tone in which it was delivered, were an attempt to threaten and intimidate the leading brothers in the local churches. It seemed brother Ron was essentially saying—If you don't fellowship with us, you're not in the fellowship of the Body, you're a 'local sect,' contaminated by leprosy and we have the authority to deal with you. If this is indeed the case, it is ugly. The "blended co-workers" appeared to be threatening to denounce, excommunicate, quarantine or cut off local churches which don't comply with their demand to participate in their "fellowship." Some brothers asked whether Brother Ron's teaching is an attempt to lay the groundwork for some future disciplinary action. May we remind you that Brother Lee's exposition of Leviticus emphasized the role of the local elders and of the apostle in dealing with such cases. For example, Brother Lee said, "**the leading brothers** or those who are concerned for the church **approach** the Lord or **the apostle**, the Lord's deputy..." [W. Lee, *Life-study of Leviticus*, Message 44]. We note that Brother Lee referred specifically to "the apostle." Nowhere did he employ nebulous terms like the "organically-deputized representatives of the Body," along the lines of Brother Ron. The New Testament is clear that authority rests with the apostles (1 Cor. 12:27). Nowhere does the New Testament recognize a group of "blended co-workers" superseding an apostle in his relationship to the churches.

We agree with the "blended co-workers" statement (uttered on several occasions) that there is no apostolic succession. Hence, none of you brothers has inherited Brother Lee's position to handle such matters. None of you is related to the local churches here as Brother Lee was. Even together, as a group of 21 brothers, you cannot fill Brother Lee's shoes as "the apostle." There is no inherited collective apostleship in Scripture. Regardless of your presumed authority as the "blended co-workers," the fact is, none of you has labored among the churches in this area as an apostle. Who then has the authority to deal with any (supposed) "leprosy" among the churches in this area? According to our realization, only Brother Titus Chu has labored directly as an apostle here, raising up churches and appointing elders (1 Cor. 9:1-2). Brother Benson, you may have some apostolic authority in relation to certain churches in Texas. You do not in this area. We feel on this issue we must be frank and honest according to the truth. Please be faithful to Brother Lee's teaching on this issue, instead of re-interpreting it in a self-serving manner.

Furthermore, we wish to remind you of Brother Lee's word regarding Romans 16:17 "*This verse can only be applied where the church life is proper. **If a Christian group is divisive already, it does not have the standing to use this verse....According to history, being unbalanced, over-emphasizing certain things, is the cause of all divisions...in some of the so-called churches, this verse could never be applied, because they do not have the standing to apply it. They are a division already. To apply this verse, we must absolutely not be divisive. We must fully be a genuine, proper local church with much balance...Only a local church that is proper, genuine, and normal has the position to apply verses such as Romans 16:17 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14.***" (W. Lee, *Speciality, Generality & Practicality...*, Chp. 4) Dear brothers, frankly we feel that this word about "*being unbalanced, over-emphasizing certain things*" applies to the "blended co-workers" recent emphasis on one publication, one unique Minister of the Age-Master builder and related matters. Since, these items are divisive factors among us, (based upon Brother Lee's word) we question the "blended co-workers" qualification to apply Romans 16:17 and similar verses. According to Brother Lee's word, only "**a genuine, proper local church with much balance**" has the position to apply these Scriptures. Have not the "*unbalanced, over-emphasizing*" teachings of the "blended co-workers" disqualified them from exercising authority in such cases?

4. The Great Lakes brothers' second letter said, "Since brother Lee's departure, you have been strongly emphasizing the matter of one ministry...you have not clearly distinguished between (1)

the one New Testament ministry, (2) the different ministries that make up this one ministry (e.g., the ministries of Peter, Paul and John), (3) the personal ministries of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, (4) ministries committed by the Lord to other workers and saints, and (5) Living Stream Ministry." (Great Lakes brothers, September 24, 2005). In your latest letter you describe Brother Lee's ministry as "this glorious ministry, which is the New Testament ministry in all its fullness." Yet, the New Testament includes the writings of the apostles Peter, Paul, John and others. Doesn't this unequivocal fact demonstrate that no single ministry (not even that of Paul) could encompass the whole "New Testament ministry in all its fullness"? How then could you make this assertion—"Brother Witness Lee's ministry...which is the New Testament ministry in all its fullness"—which violates the New Testament pattern? Was Brother Lee greater than the apostle Paul? Brother Lee never made such a claim, rather he said, "The teaching of the apostles was completed by Paul's teaching...his ministry was to...complete the revelation of the New Testament. **I had no part in this completion work...**" [W. Lee, *One Accord for the Lord's Move, Elders' Training Book*, 7, p. 42.] Surely, in saying this, Brother Lee recognized that he was less than the Apostle Paul. In elevating Brother Lee, aren't you "going beyond what is written" in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9)? No matter how much you wish to uplift Brother Lee, we cannot endorse such statements, which violate the New Testament pattern.

5. The Great Lakes brothers' third letter stated: "We recognize that, as believers today, we have a rich inheritance given by the Lord through many ministries over the centuries, especially the ministries of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, the vessels used to raise us up. However, this does not mean that the local churches receive exclusively Witness Lee's ministry and no other ministry. *'Some have said that the Lord's recovery is a one-man show, that there is room only for the ministry of Witness Lee, not for the ministry of anyone else. This is absolutely false. This is not my intention nor is it my practice.'* (W. Lee, *Truth Messages*, p. 42) The New Testament Ministry is not exclusive, but inclusive. We recognize that both Watchman Nee and Witness Lee had a portion in the New Testament ministry. However, we reject the concept that the New Testament ministry belonged **exclusively** to either Brother Nee or Brother Lee and that it belongs **exclusively** to any brother or group of brothers claiming to continue the ministry of either brother." (Great Lakes brothers, February 28, 2006). This difference in understanding between you and us on the matter of ministry, may be a root cause of other differences. Yet, on this issue, we believe our stand is faithful to the Scriptures and the ministries of brothers Nee and Lee.
6. You express great concern that we are "drifting further and further away from the present truth." Yet, based upon the observations above, we ask: Who is drifting? Who has developed a system of teachings beyond both the Scriptures and Brothers Nee and Lee? May we suggest that your diagnosis—that we are "drifting further and further away"—stems from your use of a point of reference, which differs from ours. It seems your reference point, is the "blended co-workers" teachings which extend and elaborate beyond "what has been written" in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9) and the ministries of brothers Nee and Lee. The stand we take today is the same as that expressed in *The Beliefs and Practices of the local churches* (1978). This document was not withdrawn during Brother Lee's lifetime, nor was it superseded or abrogated by Brother Lee's later ministry on the "High Peak truths" (including the Body). Again we ask, who is drifting? Your letter says, "People among us sometimes change." Indeed, we feel that the "blended co-workers" have changed in their stand and teaching. For ourselves, we boldly declare with a pure conscience that **we** have not changed, nor have we drifted.
7. Dear Brother Benson, the Great Lakes brothers are disappointed that you have failed to address the issues outlined above, plus other matters mentioned in their three letters. Instead you assert that the Great Lakes brothers' concerns have been adequately addressed on the LSM-sponsored website, AFaithfulWord.org. This is not the case. Despite the volume of material on that website (100,000 words,) it fails to address, in a forthright manner, the concerns they have raised. For

example, that website does not address the serious issue of your definition that —**“the Body equals the recovery.”** Neither does [AFaithfulWord](#) honestly address Brother Lee’s final speaking of his “painful repentance” for his attitude towards denominational believers. On the contrary, it seems the [AFaithfulWord](#) website wishes to portray Brother Lee as infallible in repenting for **the local churches’** attitude, rather than for his own personal attitude to denominational believers. Yet the translated transcript of Brother Lee’s final message reveals otherwise. He said, “*We all made mistakes in this matter in the past, **I myself included**; I confess that, I had, for this matter and before the Lord, a very painful repentance...*” (Literal translation). Previously, on another occasion, Brother Lee said, “...**do not think that any leader could not make a mistake. Only the Lord Jesus, the unique Leader, never made any mistake. It is absolutely impossible for Him to be mistaken. However, all of us, including Peter, have made many mistakes.**” [W. Lee, *One Accord for the Lord’s Move, Elders’ Training, Book 7, p. 113*] Given Brother Lee’s own admission—“do not think that any leader could not make a mistake...all of us... have made many mistakes”—why are the “blended co-workers” so reluctant to admit that Brother Lee ever made a mistake? Why does the LSM website, [AFaithfulWord.org](#) shift the focus of Brother Lee’s final repentance away from Brother Lee to the local churches? Moreover, the attempt by [AFaithfulWord.org](#) to provide a scriptural basis for your ‘one publication’ policy is fatally flawed by *eisegesis*. These are just a few examples. Put succinctly, we are motivated to ask: Given its name, to whose word is this website faithful? [AFaithfulWord.org](#) is not faithful to God’s Word, nor to the word of the ministry of Brothers Nee and Lee. Rather, [AFaithfulWord.org](#) seems to be a “Word to the Faithful,” the faithful followers of LSM, who are willing to give blanket endorsement to whatever you brothers say.

8. Rather than address the Great Lakes brothers’ concerns you invite them back to your “blending,” in the form of the seven LSM feasts. Yet, it seems that, in your concept and practice, “blending” (like “fellowship”) is a “one-way street.” We appreciate Brother Lee’s exposition of blending in the copious quotes you cite. Yet, we have looked in vain, for the genuine application of Brother Lee’s fellowship in your interactions with us. For example, when did the “blended co-workers” ever “stop and fellowship” with us before proceeding on a course of action (which Brother Lee says is the real meaning of blending)? What about the “blended co-workers’” decision to hold a young peoples’ conference in Chicago this Labor day weekend (Sept. 1-4, 2006)—Did you brothers stop and fellowship with us, before inviting the young people in the churches we serve? NO. You accuse Brother Titus of conducting conferences which (according to you) compete with LSM-sponsored events. Yet the “blending brothers” don’t hesitate to schedule a conference in Chicago to compete with the Labor Day Weekend conference in Cleveland, which had been held continuously since 1993 for all the Great lakes churches. Isn’t this is double standard? Moreover, we reject the notion, implicit in your letter, that authentic blending only occurs at LSM-sponsored events, under the ministry of the “blended co-workers.”
9. Dear brothers, your latest letter adds to our disquiet. We are alarmed by your statement that it is not sufficient to be “altogether according to the leading of Brother Lee in his ministry.” Rather, you assert that, we must also be restricted by **“the history of Brother Lee’s leading** in the recovery.” This statement has serious implications. By this assertion, aren’t you implying the churches should be restricted by Brother Lee’s personal practice and his individual leading from the Lord? Perhaps this explains why you object to certain practices, based solely on Brother Lee’s personal feeling, without any Scriptural basis whatsoever [***The Ministry***, vol. 8, no. 6, (June 2004) p. 97]. Where will this process end? Brother Lee strongly objected to the use of multi-colored tracts and gospel invitations; endorsing only black-and-white. Do you brothers intend to impose this requirement on all the churches? Brother Lee felt personally that he should only wear white shirts when he ministered. The “blended co-workers” also follow Brother Lee in this practice. That is up to your conscience before the Lord. Do you now intend to impose a “white shirt requirement” on all ministering brothers throughout the recovery, based upon “the history of Brother Lee’s leading in the recovery”? Doesn’t this amount to establishing **a tradition** based

upon Brother Lee's personal practice? During the Reformation, the Protestants stood for "Scripture alone." They rejected the Roman Catholic view that tradition should have any weight to counter-balance the Scriptures. Brother Benson, are you now suggesting the recovery return to Rome by re-establishing tradition (based upon "the history of Brother Lee's leading") as a governing factor? Moreover, doesn't your statement contradict Brother Lee's own teaching? He said, "*All the local churches have the full freedom to go on. **As long as you do not do anything against our New Testament constitution, no one will bother you.***" (W. Lee, A Timely Word, p. 40). In contrast, you are saying that following "our New Testament constitution" (being "altogether according to the leading of Brother Lee in his ministry") is **not** adequate. Apparently, you wish to impose the further yoke of "**the history** of Brother Lee's leading in the recovery" upon all the local churches. Won't this inevitably result in the Lord's recovery becoming a "Witness Lee denomination"? You suggest that we should be governed by "our tradition," based upon "the history of Brother Lee's leading..." established over the past 10, 20 or 40 years. However, Brother Nee clearly taught that we should return to the beginning, rather than looking to our own recent history. He said, "*If we would understand the will of God...**we should not look to see how He led His people last year, or ten years ago, or a hundred years ago, but we should return to the beginning, to the "genesis" of the Church...***" [W. Nee, Normal Christian Church Life, p. xvi] Brother, we are for recovery—returning to the beginning—not a restoration, based upon tradition, even that established by our own recent history.

The Great Lakes brothers concluded each of their three letters with a request: for "a time of fellowship with **[1]** all the **[21]** brothers who signed your letter, **[2]** Brother Titus, and **[3]** a representative number of brothers from among us. We feel that according to Acts 15 this is the way to resolve any difficulties that have arisen and persist." (June 12, 2005). To date no meaningful response has been received. Where then is the blending? The brothers' request still remains outstanding.

Your brothers in Christ,

Paul B. Neider,

Nigel Tomes,

James Yang,

Vern Yoder

PS The substance of this letter was brought into the fellowship of approximately 75 leading brothers from the Great Lakes area churches who recently gathered together.