

An Open Letter of Affirmation and Clarification Concerning the Church in Mansfield and Recent Events Causing Confusion

April 24, 2007

Dear Brother and Sisters,

We are writing to you to affirm the standing of the church in Mansfield as an expression of the unique, universal Body of Christ. We do so because of recent events that have transpired in the church in Mansfield, Ohio, and the confusion surrounding those events which make it necessary to speak the truth for the welfare of the Lord's interests in Mansfield and in His recovery throughout the earth.

AN AFFIRMATION CONCERNING THE CHURCH IN MANSFIELD

The church in Mansfield was raised up in 1966 after years of seeking by a number of local believers coupled with a large measure of God's grace and the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. The church was established on the unique foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:10-11) as revealed in the New Testament teaching and fellowship of the apostles (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20). As such, we have always stood upon and for the common faith once delivered to the saints (Titus 1:4; Jude 1:3).

We affirm the foundational truths of the Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Spirit—all three divine, co-eternal, co-existent and co-inherent. We hold forth Jesus Christ as our Savior (2 Tim. 1:10) and salvation through His crucifixion (Gal. 2:20) and His shed blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19). We enjoy the Holy Spirit as the indwelling One (Rom. 8:11) and look forward to Christ's return and the manifestation of His kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1; Heb 12:28).

Today, we are enjoying the rich fellowship of the local churches around the globe as the expression and practicality of the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), we recognize and receive all genuine believers in Christ as our fellow members of that one, unique Body (Rom. 14: 1-3). We also enjoy the rich supply of the ministry of the age as carried out by so many faithful brothers. This is our history, our heritage, our

stand, our joy and our vocation. However, recent days have revealed an effort to rob us of this heritage and enjoyment.

THE ABUSE OF “AUTHORITY”

Authority Usurped — A New “Ground of the Church” Mandated

Titus Chu is a full-time, independent worker based in Cleveland, Ohio. He has exerted considerable influence over the churches in Ohio and beyond for many years. He has openly railed against the co-workers who care for the local churches throughout the Lord's recovery as well as against Living Stream Ministry. In an apparent effort to assert his control in Mansfield, without consideration for the feeling of the saints in Mansfield and without fellowship with them, on Labor Day, 2006, Titus Chu presumed to appoint four new “elders” to the church in Mansfield.

One of Titus Chu's co-workers was sent to Mansfield to inform the church of these appointments on September 17, 2006. In the meeting of the church, Titus Chu's co-worker made an announcement installing this new “eldership” which lasted over an hour. In this speech, he changed the unique standing of the church in Mansfield from being an expression of the unique Body of Christ, inclusive of all believers, to that of the new “elders” with their assumed authority and purposes. He declared that all the members of the church in Mansfield must adhere to the direction, speaking, and authority of these newly appointed “elders.” If any of the members did not agree with this, he said that it would be best for those members to meet elsewhere.

For 40 years the church in Mansfield has welcomed all of God's redeemed and regenerated people to partake freely of the Lord's table. However, Titus Chu's co-worker ended this practice and instituted a new legalistic standard in its place. He declared to the church that partaking of the Lord's table was now a privilege reserved only for members who tithed (gave the church 10% of their income), attended the prayer meetings, strictly followed the elders, and participated in the practical services of the church.

Many of the members of the church in Mansfield were deeply disturbed by these declarations and had no peace to partake of the bread and the wine on the next three Lord's Days. Most of the members of the church did not attend the Lord's Day meetings in

Mansfield on October 15. Some of these—including elderly widows with long histories in the church—decided to visit the neighboring church in Elyria.

One of the newly appointed “elders” publicly declared in the Lord’s Day morning that a number of members, including those who were visiting the church in Elyria, had left the church in Mansfield. This was not true. There was no contact, fellowship, correspondence, or visit with any of these members branded as “those who have left.” Most of these members have met with the church in Mansfield since before that “elder” was born.

The events in Mansfield and the saints’ discomfort with the changes were brought up in a fellowship meeting in Iowa City on October 21, 2006. Representatives of twenty other area local churches and some co-workers were in attendance. There was a common agreement among those present that these members of the church in Mansfield should not be forced out of their home church but should feel free to continue to meet as they had for the past 40 years.

The Church Life under Siege by False Authority

The following week the members who were reported to have left the church in Mansfield returned to the Lord’s Day morning meeting. The following is a brief presentation of what happened that morning.

The Events of October 29, 2006

The regularly scheduled Lord’s Day meeting was held in the hall of the church in Mansfield. After the Lord’s table, the symbols were removed and a word of clarification was spoken by one of the “elders” to set the agenda for the following meeting. A number of saints then testified of their experience in the previous week’s function held at a retreat facility, Huntington House. Next a message was delivered from Matthew 18 by one of the “elders.”

At that point, Tim Knoppe, a visiting brother from the church in Wixom who had served in Mansfield and had a history of shepherding the saints here, stood up to speak. He affirmed the clarification made by the “elder” and began to present a brief history of the Lord’s recovery. He then referenced the revelation of Christ and the church in Matthew 16, pointing out the matter of the kingdom and mentioning

the practicality of Matthew 18 in order to deal with problems in the church.

At that point Titus Chu’s co-worker interjected, “Brother, stay within the bounds of the topic.” Brother Tim said that he would. Titus’s co-worker replied, “You have two minutes to finish, and stay within the bounds of the topic.” Brother Tim agreed to this. But, before he could speak further, Titus Chu’s co-worker stood and began to speak. It became apparent that he had no intention of stopping to let Tim continue. Tim then said, “Excuse me. If you would let me speak, I will be finished in two minutes.” Titus’s co-worker told him that he could not speak anymore and that he must sit down. Tim responded, “No, I will not sit down. I have two minutes to finish.”

Then, one of the “elders” stood up and announced loudly, “The meeting is over, the meeting is over. I am the authority; I am an elder. I have the authority. The meeting is over.” The meeting came to an abrupt end some thirty minutes short of the normal time. Some members began to leave, one member was shouting, the majority sat quietly bewildered. At this juncture, one of the “elders” called the police.

Three squad cars with six policemen came to the meeting hall, where they witnessed church members, many of whom were elderly widows in their 70s and 80s, sitting, standing, and talking. The police found multiple conversations taking place in small groups at a normal volume. The “elder” who called the police left the premises. The police inquired as to the nature of the disturbance. Finding that there was no disturbance, they left the premises after a short period of time. There was no statement taken and no police report was filed.

Some of the elderly ones who had been members of the church in Mansfield since 1966 spoke a solemn, “Shame on you,” to the co-worker of Titus Chu and to the two brothers who remained who had supported the calling of the police.

There followed an informal time of question and answer over the next two hours. During this time, Titus’s co-worker visibly lost his temper three times. He said he was sorry the police had been called. He declared that the saints he was addressing (the ones who had reportedly left the church in Mansfield) were his spiritual parents and

that he appreciated them for allowing him to learn his leadership skills while living in Mansfield for ten years. He then got on his knees and asked everyone to join him to pray. When no one responded, he stood up and assumed a provocative posture, standing within inches of Tim's face and declaring in a challenging voice, "Punch me. Come on, punch me. You want to hit me, don't you? Come on, punch me." This display was unprovoked. Brother Tim responded, "Brother you are too close to me. Get back." When Titus's co-worker maintained his aggressive stance, Brother Tim gently extended his hand to the brother's chest and said, "Brother, you are too close. Give me eighteen inches." Titus's co-worker strongly responded, "I am not moving." Brother Tim said, "Okay," and took one step backward, defusing the situation. Many of those remaining in the meeting hall witnessed these events and would willingly testify as to what happened. After the worker's outburst, the question and answer session began again, ending at approximately 3:00 P.M.

DIVISION MANIFESTED

The Church in Mansfield—Locked Out

On the following Lord's Day, November 5, 2006, more than half the members of the church in Mansfield arrived at the church's meeting hall for the morning gathering. They found that the meeting hall was locked and empty, the locks on the doors had been changed, and the members were left standing out in the cold. None of them were forewarned that this would happen. Only a select minority of the members had been advised to meet elsewhere.

In this way, the "elders" divided the church in Mansfield; they choose only to contact their supporters concerning the time and place of their meetings. They decided to exclude the majority of the members from the church by their lockout, making their meeting a sect.

On the following Lord's Day, November 12, 2006, once again the majority of the members of the church were locked out and not able to meet in their own facility. Two letters of inquiry were then sent to the four brothers responsible for this action (an additional letter was written at a later date). The hall was once again locked and empty on November 19, 2006. There were no phone calls, no notices, and no answer to the letters of inquiry signed by many long-time members.

The same situation happened on the subsequent two Lord's Days, November 26 and December 3, 2006.

The new "elders," the new direction, the influence exercised over the church in Mansfield, and perhaps even the instigation of the lockout have come from workers affiliated with the regional work of Titus Chu, centered in Cleveland, Ohio. This extra-local influence has resulted in a major deviation from the normal church practice that has been enjoyed by the members of the church in Mansfield throughout its forty year history.

We are saddened that an erroneous version of the October 29, 2006, meeting has been posted on the Internet. In the post, a quote from the 34-year-old "elder" rashly accuses Living Stream Ministry (LSM), a Christian publisher, of pulling strings behind the scenes to impose their control over the church in Mansfield. We can testify that LSM had no part in the events described above.

Rather, these four "elders," who should have learned to shepherd the saints in love and to serve them as slaves, in only their sixth week as "elders," locked the majority of the members out of their meeting facility. Their actions as newly minted "elders," appointed by Titus Chu of Cleveland and installed by the visiting co-worker of Titus Chu, clearly demonstrate that there is outside interference in Mansfield, not by Living Stream Ministry but by Titus Chu and some of his workers.

These events reveal the nature of the new regime of "elders." Rather than feed the flock, they exercised their assumed authority. In the process they dishonored many saints, including some of those who paid the price to establish the church life in Mansfield forty years ago. This type of behavior should not occur in any of the churches in the Lord's recovery. It reminds us of the slave in Matthew 24 who mistreats his fellow slaves (v. 49) rather than feeding them (v. 45). For a proper view concerning authority, see the ministry below.

THE TRUTH CONCERNING AUTHORITY

The testimony and practice of the local churches and the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee have never condoned the exercise of claimed, presumed authority to control the churches or their members. Please consider the following quotations from Brother Nee and Brother Lee:

To claim authority over the saints indicates that one does not have any authority.

We should never try to bring others under our authority. Such a thing is a hierarchy; it is something of organization. We should not try to rule over the saints. Instead, we should humble ourselves and remain under the throne in the clear sky.

It is shameful for anyone to claim to be the authority in a local church. There is no such thing! In the church there is no human authority.

I would remind all the dear ones who bear responsibility in the local churches never to exercise their authority. We need to realize that none of us has any authority.

It is a serious mistake to exercise authority over others in the church. Nothing is more shameful than this. To exercise authority over the saints is not glorious—it is shameful.

(Witness Lee, Life-study of Ezekiel, pp. 116-119)

We must never speak one word to vindicate our own authority; rather, we should give others the full liberty... If they do not want us to be their authority, or if they shy away from us, we do not have to force them to accept us. It is a most ugly thing for anyone to speak for his authority in order to establish authority for himself.

(Watchman Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 47, p. 220)

Elders, therefore, are not appointed to be rulers exercising authority over others. Ruling over others is ugly and base. The elders should never rule anyone. In the Gospel of Matthew the Lord Jesus said that He is the only Lord and Master and we all are brothers (23:8, 10). This means that the elders, the overseers, are also no more than brothers.

According to the New Testament teaching, there is no rank for the elders. There is also no controlling power for the elders, because they do not have any rank. The elders do not have any right to control. The clear word of the New Testament does not allow any ground for the elders to take rank or controlling power.

(Witness Lee, The Conclusion of the New Testament, pp. 2160-2161, 2164-2165)

I would say a word to the elders concerning their authority: We have to have the basic understanding that there is no authority within ourselves.

Do not think that as long as a person is an elder he has authority. We have to know and understand authority. Only those who understand authority have authority. If the elders do not understand authority, they are not qualified to be elders, and they are not fit to be an authority.

(Watchman Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 61, p. 215)

When seen in the light of the above references, the divisive and presumptuous words and actions of the “elders” in Mansfield stand in stark contrast to the truth in the Lord’s recovery. Such behavior should not be accepted among us; it is not representative of our teaching, our stand, our practice, or our spiritual heritage.

OUTSIDE LEADERSHIP

It is not we, the excluded and locked-out saints in Mansfield, who have brought in outside leadership. It was the “elders,” Titus Chu, and Titus’s co-worker. The four “elders” were appointed by Titus Chu apart from any fellowship with the members of the church in Mansfield. Their “eldership” was imposed upon the church here. The proclamation of their “eldership,” their installation into office, was made by the visiting worker, from Detroit. Many of the activities of this “eldership,” including those described in this booklet, appear to have been directed by Titus Chu, his co-worker, and possibly others outside of Mansfield.

The church’s financial records show that the “elders” chose to contribute \$1,750 each month from the church in Mansfield’s local account to support Titus Chu’s work plus another \$300 for Titus himself. An additional \$200 was sent to Life Ministries in Willoughby, Ohio, another part of the work of Titus Chu, to support his work in Uganda during this time. Another \$100 each month was spent on an individual’s home in Huntington, Ohio, also related to Titus’ work. In all over half of the church’s total monthly income flowed from Mansfield to the work of Titus Chu under the direction of elders appointed by Titus Chu. This raises a red flag that there is indeed an

outside leadership that has an interest in controlling the church in Mansfield.

OUR RESPONSE

In response to the extra-local leadership thrust upon the church here, the members called a duly noticed and lawful business meeting of the church in Mansfield on December 1, 2006. Written notices were sent to all the members of the church named on the phone list. Thirty-five members, a significant majority of the church members, attended the business meeting. During this meeting, new trustees were unanimously elected by the members present. Although the “elders” chose not to come, they did hire a lawyer to observe the proceedings.

The “eldership,” appointed and encouraged by outside influence, then refused to recognize the legitimate results of this lawful election. They tried to maintain their lock-out of the members of the church and to continue their hold on the church in defiance of the will of the majority of the church members. They continued to attempt to control the assets of the church despite the results of the December 1 business meeting. Because of their actions, we were forced to ask the court to recognize this legitimate business meeting of the church in Mansfield and the election of the trustees.

We believe that in due time the judge will uphold our action as lawful. In the meantime, we urge all the saints in Mansfield, regardless of your feelings on the issues presented herein, to maintain the sweet oneness of the Body of Christ. We welcome you to meet with us as we continue to enjoy the Lord for His satisfaction in the church and His testimony in Mansfield.

BEYOND MANSFIELD: DIVISIONS PERSIST

The divisions caused and perpetuated by Titus Chu and some of his co-workers extends beyond Mansfield. Sadly, the influence of this work has caused turmoil and division in many places throughout the earth, including Toronto, Canada; Columbus, Ohio; and Kampala, Uganda. The facts on these incidents are well documented on <http://www.afaithfulword.org>.

Concluding Fellowship

We hope that by reading this booklet you can realize, before the Lord, what has transpired in the church in Mansfield. As those responsible to the Lord Jesus, we are compelled to present this detailed record of events. Since an errant version of these events has already been made public on the Internet, we must set the record straight. We do so out of our love for the church in Mansfield, all of its members, and all the local churches in the Lord’s recovery throughout the earth.

We hold no bitterness toward the former “elders.” Although they are no longer “elders” (if they ever were) they are our brothers and, as such, we ask them to turn from their way and to fellowship with us in Christ. We pray that our situation in Mansfield can be resolved peacefully.

Although we do not have free use of our hall for now, we do continue to meet to break bread, pray, and fellowship over the Word of God. We testify that once again we can sing, “How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.” We invite you to join us in this blessing and to stand for the oneness of the universal Body of Christ expressed in the local churches.

For the Lord’s recovery and the church in Mansfield,

Brian Baer

Ben Flieger

Jim Jamerson

Bob Ludwig

Bob Mellick