

January 14, 2021

To the leading brothers serving in the United States:

We hope that this letter finds you and the saints you are with empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength to render Him your full cooperation (Eph. 6:10). In this crucial time we must be diligent to keep the oneness and the one accord among all the local churches in His Body, which is the master key to all the New Testament blessings. At the same time we must also be cognizant that whenever God is moving, His enemy, Satan, is active to stir up problems. As Brother Lee taught us, we should expect turmoil as we journey together with the Lord (*CWWL, 1989, vol. 4, 338-341*). Such turmoils cause suffering and grief and, on occasion, demand a response from the Lord's servants. Today we are faced with such a situation. Since 2018 co-workers have sought on numerous occasions to address two specific problems in the Oklahoma City-area (OKC-area) churches; however our counsel was rejected.

It is because of the extensive damage to the saints and the churches that we must now clearly state our standing regarding the serious problems resulting primarily from the actions of Brother Colley Joseph, a co-worker and elder in OKC. These actions have affected saints and churches not only in the OKC area but in many other places due to the widespread propagation of his improper, biased, and reviling emails. In broad terms, this situation involves principles related to two matters—the handling of family conflicts and the proper use of the Word and of the ministry of our brothers Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. In this letter we initially would like to put forth a set of governing principles regarding these two matters.

First, in our dealing with family matters as leading ones in the churches, we should follow some basic principles. Although we are charged to care for the saints, there are boundaries we must observe, including in our touching of the saints' marriages (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee [CWWL], 1960, vol. 2, 245*). Although we need to shepherd couples in troubled marriages, we should not intrude or attempt to adjudicate between right and wrong in family issues, lest we entangle the church in the dispute and factions ensue (*CWWL, 1950-1951, vol. 1, 156-157*). Moreover, the saints' private affairs should remain private as much as possible. Publicly exposing failures can damage families and affect a person's reputation and standing in society, invite litigation, and terminate the elders' function. Brother Lee told us, "Whoever uncovers the defects, shortcomings, and sins of the members of the church is disqualified from the eldership. Our uncovering of the members under our eldership, our shepherding, annuls our qualification" (*CWWL, 1994-1997, vol. 5, 124*). Today there are also legal protections against character defamation that we all must respect (*CWWL, 1984, vol. 2, 433; 1985, vol. 1, 494-495; vol. 2, 426*).

Also, if a brother bearing responsibility is accused of serious wrongdoing, he should cease his serving unless and until his name is cleared and the saints are confident and peaceful that he resume his service. This withdrawing from serving by an accused brother is not to admit fault but to spare the church from much disquiet and to allow the brother to focus his attention on responding appropriately to the accusations against him. For example, to spare the churches, Brother Nee stopped his work and public ministry among the churches for six years due to false accusations that stirred up turmoil in the church in Shanghai.

Furthermore, we unequivocally condemn any form of abusive activity, including toward spouses or children in the context of a family or toward the saints in the context of the church, and do not agree with covering up any form of abuse, whether physical, sexual, or psychological (1 Tim. 3:2-5; see "A Letter from the Co-workers in North America" dated July 5, 2019; "Handing Allegations of Abuse"; and "Covering, Not Covering Up" on shepherdingwords.com). Moreover, although church governance and

administration are not the state's responsibility, we also affirm that the churches, and the saints within them, are bound to respect the laws, the courts, and other secular authorities as representatives of God's authority in this age (Rom. 13:1-5; Titus 3:1-2).

Second, in handling both the Word and the ministry, we must exercise to be pure, putting aside any self-interest, including self-vindication. In our handling of the Word, we must be diligent to present ourselves "approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). In our dealing with the ministry, we must learn to apply it in an accurate, fair, and balanced manner, lest we misrepresent its teaching. For example, the Word of God shows us that the apostles, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, appoint elders to oversee and administrate the churches (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Titus 1:5). This has been the ministry's teaching and our practice for decades. However, a local church is not an autonomy, and its elders should not carry out their service as if it is. Brother Nee taught that when faced with making a decision, a local church "will not act presumptuously, using the excuse that the administration of churches is local; instead, it will consult the other assemblies" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee [CWWN], vol. 22, 58*). Brother Lee taught that the administration of a local church must be carried out under the vision of the Body of Christ and that we must see, know, care for, and honor the Body (*CWWL, 1993, vol. 2, 106-107, 535-536, 538, 543-546, 548-549, 551-552*). Also, the Bible shows us that the apostles have an ongoing relationship with established churches, including the responsibility to intervene if a church is in serious disorder or if an elder is improper (1 Cor. 1:11; 4:21; 11:34; 1 Tim. 5:19-21). Both Brother Nee and Brother Lee faithfully taught this (see "The Ongoing Relationship Between the Apostles and the Local Churches" on shepherdwords.com and the attached "Ministry Excerpts Pertinent to Problems Arising in the OKC-Area").

It grieves us to say that all of these principles have been trampled and, in some cases, attacked in the OKC area, causing much suffering to the saints, damage to churches, and confusion both in the OKC area and in other places. We wish to make it clear that we are not taking sides or passing judgment on any of the family issues. Rather, we are plainly stating our position regarding the unjustifiable and abusive mishandling of these matters and the misrepresentation of Watchman Nee's and Witness Lee's ministry.

We denounce and disassociate ourselves from how the marriage issues have been mishandled and the controversy that mishandling engendered. To be clear, we are not denouncing or disassociating ourselves from the churches, the saints, or the elders in the OKC area. Neither are we saying that only the OKC-area elders made errors, nor are we passing any kind of judgment on who is right and who is wrong in the conflicts within the marriages. Our concern is with the OKC-area leading ones' inappropriate responses. When the conflict between a leading brother and his wife first emerged, the OKC-area leading ones erred by taking sides with their fellow leading brother against his wife. They abandoned the proper function of elders, which is to shepherd and feed all the saints (John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:2-3; Matt. 24:45), and became partisans. This destroyed any possibility that the elders could be a factor of reconciliation and inevitably led to the formation of parties within the church and the churches and the loss of many saints from the church life (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2).

The OKC-area elders assumed an authority that they did not have to deal with a fellow leading one; if they felt that the matter needed adjudication, they should have referred it to leading co-workers who are qualified to exercise apostolic authority (1 Tim. 5:19; *CWWL, 1965, vol. 4, 189-190*). Instead, despite co-workers' repeated requests, Colley refused to allow the leading brother to withdraw, even though the brother himself offered to do so. That refusal continued even after third-party professionals initiated an inquiry by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. Whether the accusations made are true or not, the prudent action would have been for the brother to step

aside from responsibility and from playing any public role in the church. Indeed, by not allowing him to do this, the elders caused some saints great concern, threw the church into turmoil, opened the door to potential civil litigation, and put the Lord's recovery in danger of suffering irreparable public disgrace.

Colley took the lead to send out copious emails full of intemperate and vile accusations against the wives in the two marriage disputes. His sarcastic and reviling emails were blind-copied to many people and forwarded to many more. These unseemly emails exhibited extreme partiality and were a major factor in spreading contagion. They show that he constructed a biased and speculative narrative fairly early on, largely based on talks with one of the husbands, whom he said he believed from the day he returned from Belize on January 6, 2018, even before he spoke to the wife the following day. Subsequently, he incorporated additional "facts" that he felt supported that narrative and rejected anything that did not, including the findings of several professionals regarding allegations of child abuse. Throughout he exhibited a single-minded determination to convince others of the rightness of his opinions irrespective of the cost to the involved individuals and their families, to the saints, and to the churches.

We would remind you of the sober word concerning reviling that was given during message 4 of the October 2020 ITERO under section I.E. of the outline, concerning the mistreating of fellow believers. In that section a definition of reviling is given: "reviling is when we cause the saints to inwardly suffer pain or to be inwardly wounded by assailing and criticizing them harshly with abusive language." Colley strongly and repeatedly made accusations and insinuations against saints of vile conduct and motives that we would not repeat here to spare you from defilement. Both the things he asserted and the language he used to do so were cruel, reprehensible, and misrepresent both the Lord and His recovery. In addition, he has continued to claim that one wife coached her children to accuse her husband of abuse, even though the accusations at issue were brought forth by third parties. Furthermore, a licensed professional who was counseling the children testified in court of seeing no indication of such coaching with one child and the impossibility of coaching with the other. That testimony stood as given and was not refuted; it became a factor in the judge's decision to suspend the father's visitation rights.

These scathing attacks extended beyond the sisters directly involved. He accused one sister's extended family of being a "Klan," engaging in Nazi-style propaganda, and seeking a "public execution" of her husband, saying that they wished him to be "skinned and then hung and then burned alive." He said those who disagreed with him were the family's "minions" whipped into a "hysteria" akin to the Salem witch trials. Faithful brothers in the Lord who urged restraint were dismissed as "mentally or intellectually challenged," "morally dishonest," and psychologically unfit. These were not isolated incidents but a pattern of behavior over more than two years manifested in literally hundreds of emails, some of which were addressed directly to the OKC leading ones. Even if his emails had been grounded with provable facts (and they were not), it is a grievous abuse to expose the saints' private matters, to rail on their perceived failures and weaknesses, and to tarnish their reputations with such inflammatory language. It grieves us even to mention these words, but we are compelled to do so in an effort to recover, preserve, and establish saints who have been affected by them, as well as to set the record straight for others and for posterity that these aberrant actions do not represent the Lord or the ministry and the churches in His recovery.

Moreover, instead of counseling and modeling restraint as some of the co-workers advised him to do, more emails were sent out, deriding the co-workers who tendered that advice, saying that they were "overstepping," "undermining," "supporting division" and acting as "bishops" in a

“hierarchy.” He characterized them as “‘shooting from the hip’ without a ‘full deck.’” He said that they drank the family’s “cool-aid” [sic] and that the saints who listened to them did the same because those co-workers “have more stars on their chest.” He misrepresented their counsel of restraint as advocating that the accused brother “be thrown under the bus, essentially be excommunicated.” When some co-workers visited the OKC area and spoke with some of the parties involved, he said that the sister in one of the disputes “played the brothers like a fiddle.” Brothers, such talk is unquestionably divisive.

After multiple occasions in which we had serious fellowship with him, he eventually agreed to stop his emails in which he attacked either the saints or the co-workers, but each time he continued his biased running commentary. Only after being told emphatically by one of the co-workers to “cease and desist” did he, at least initially, curtail his practice. There is no evidence, however, that he in any way has sought to undo the damage done by any of his emails.

Furthermore, we must denounce the misuse of the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee in an attempt to justify the errors made by the OKC-area leading ones in refusing the counsel of a number of co-workers. Again, this is not a denunciation of the brothers but of what they have done. Excerpts have been widely disseminated that misrepresent and intentionally distort the full ministry of our brothers Watchman Nee and Witness Lee to support the notion that elders have autonomous authority without accountability over matters involving the churches and the saints in their localities. During the turmoil in the late 1980s Brother Lee strongly condemned the teaching of autonomy as a different teaching contrary to God’s economy (*CWWL*, 1988, vol. 3, 283-285, 386; 1988, vol. 4, 25, 95-96, 310; 1989, vol. 1, 377-379; 1989, vol. 4, 207; 1990, vol. 2, 196; 1993, vol. 2, 98, 270; see also *Life-study of Genesis*, 456). In the last stage of his ministry Brother Lee strongly charged us, “We need to be governed and controlled by this vision and see clearly that what we are doing is not the work of one local church but the work of one Body” (*CWWL*, 1994-1997, vol. 2, 333). Under the heading “The Erroneous Teaching of Autonomy” Brother Lee wrote, “Autonomous means ‘self-governed, independent’” (*CWWL*, 1989, vol.1, 277). The thrust of many emails that Colley has sent out is clearly designed to insulate the churches in the heartland area from any direct involvement of the leading co-workers in addressing the problems in the OKC area. This is a different teaching, a wind of teaching, that is contrary to God’s Word (1 Tim. 1:3; Eph. 4:14; *CWWL*, 1988, vol. 3, 386; 1989, vol. 1, 377-378; 1989, vol. 3, 406-407; 1993, vol. 2, 544-545). We must be faithful to warn you, as Brother Lee warned us all in 1989, that even spirituality or scriptural teachings, if overstressed, can become factors of division. Among the teachings he mentioned that could be used in this way were “the teaching concerning the headship of Christ, the teaching concerning all the churches being responsible directly to Christ alone, and the teaching concerning not exalting man” (*CWWL*, 1989, vol. 4, 383). The misuse of some of these teachings is exactly what the emails have been promoting. In addition, emails have been sent out to sow suspicion against any co-workers who might seek to render help in addressing the problems the churches in the OKC area have been facing. That is reprehensible and divisive. We have attached a set of excerpts that show that an insistence on the absolute authority of local elders is not according to the biblical principles presented through the ministry of Brother Nee and Brother Lee.

It is a matter of great sorrow to us that we must tell you that our brother Colley has, by such actions, disqualified himself from any further role as a worker or an elder among us. He has made serious errors in his handling of both the marriage conflicts and the truth. To revile saints disqualifies a brother from being either a co-worker or an elder. To ignore the possible committing of criminal abuse is likewise a serious lapse in judgment that we cannot disregard. The potential ramifications for the dear saints, their children, the churches in the OKC area, and the recovery as a whole are far too great. To misrepresent the truth likewise disqualifies a brother from participating in the

work or the eldership (Titus 1:9). We have, therefore, instructed him to withdraw from his participation in both the work extra-locally and the eldership in Oklahoma City.

Please be assured that in spite of recent problems, we regard all the churches and saints in Oklahoma to be part of the Lord's recovery. We have no intent to disassociate ourselves from or condemn the churches and the saints in Oklahoma but are instead clarifying that the aberrant actions and teachings of the leadership in the OKC area do not represent the ministry and the churches in the Lord's recovery. Our strong desire is to shepherd, restore, and preserve all the saints and the churches that have been affected. We are compelled to be faithful to the responsibility that the Lord has given us for the churches and the entire Body to contact, to fellowship with, and to care for the saints and the churches (Acts 20:27, 31; 1 Thes. 2:7-8, 11). Because we consider the United States, the heartland, and the churches in Oklahoma to be a key part of the Lord's move, our deep realization is that the churches and saints in Oklahoma must be healthy and strong for the Lord's testimony.

It is our sincere hope and yearning that the leading ones in the OKC area would continue to join us in seeking the Lord to afford Him an opportunity to recover lost ground and take the churches there on in a healthy way. We are encouraging the brothers there to desperately seek the Lord and be humbled under His mighty hand, admit their errors, and repent, confess, and seek to reconcile with and restore others, thus inviting God's mercy, lovingkindness, compassion, and grace (1 Pet. 5:5-6). We are very much before the Lord concerning how to co-labor with Him to set matters in order based on and governed by New Testament principles and our practice in the Lord's recovery (1 Cor. 11:34b and footnote; 4:17). We ask you to encourage all the saints and churches to be vigilant to resist Satan, God's enemy, who would seek to dishearten the saints and ultimately sow division among the churches—"For our wrestling is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies" (Eph. 6:12). To thwart his attack, it is vital that you join us in exhorting all the saints not to gossip, conjecture, or spread rumors or opinions among the saints by word of mouth or by any electronic means but to follow the leading of the co-workers and to pray for the Lord to manifest His victory and His glory.

We ask you to share this letter with those saints in the church who might benefit from it. Our sincere desire is that the Lord would use these words to preserve the uninformed, recover the wounded and deceived, and establish those who are troubled and wavering. We know that some saints may be troubled by this fellowship due to rumors they have heard. Please know that all of you are in our hearts (2 Cor. 3:2; 7:3). We also ask you, as leading ones in His recovery, to read together *A Word of Love to the Co-workers, Elders, Lovers, and Seekers of the Lord*, paying special attention to the last three chapters.

Before the Lord and for the sake of His testimony among us, we are compelled to take a public stance that is consistent with both our collective practice over many decades and the ministry we all esteem so highly. The actions taken by the leading ones in the OKC area have put all the churches in the entire recovery at substantial risk of being associated with extreme partiality and even with the appearance of a cover up. We are very grieved over this situation and the damage it has brought to the churches and the saints.

May the Lord pour out His abundant and unceasing mercy upon all the saints, including you brothers, that He may preserve us all faithful to the end (2 Tim. 4:7-8) and bountifully supply us to be those who co-labor with Him to tenderly shepherd and heal any wounded saints, to restore the sweet one accord in and among the churches, and to cause His testimony to shine brightly. May the Lord strengthen and bless His recovery.

Your brothers,

Albert Lim	Benson Phillips	Bob Danker	Chris Wilde
Dan Sady	David Koo	Dennis Higashi	Ed Marks
Jerry McGill	Jim Miller	Joe Davis	Ken Walker
Mark Raabe	Minoru Chen	James Lee	Marty Robert
Phil Delp	Ray Graver	Ricky Acosta	Rick Scatterday
Steve Watts	Ron Kangas	Ted Williamson	Tom Goetz
Tym Seay			

Enclosed: Ministry Excerpts Pertinent to Problems Arising in the OKC Area