6-15-1966

To: Harold Poland

John Allen Chalk
June 15, 1966

Mr. Harold Poland
College Town Church of Christ
3605 Desiard Street
Monroe, Louisiana

Dear Harold:

I do regret that we will not probably get to see each other personally before you move to Cookeville. My last service here, according to present plans, will be Sunday, June 26. I will probably not teach the Wednesday evening class that week, but someone will take care of it. Our understanding is that you will be here for the first Sunday in July. We appreciate your letting us know of your decision about the stove.

In a very brief way I will try to answer your questions, even though the best thing for us to do would be to spend several hours together face to face. There has been some concern among our fellow preachers that anyone coming to Broad Street would have a difficult time with "preacher worshippers." I sincerely do not believe that will be the case. Certainly it will not be the case for those who are the involved and committed members of the congregation. The same superficial members who worshipped Brother Gilbert Shaffer and continually threw him up to me during my first years will probably do the same thing regarding me to you; so I beg you to ignore it.

I don't know of any special personalities that I could detail for you in a letter with whom you will have to deal in the congregation. There is a definite "hard core" group of people who are responsible for this church's "Christian witness" in this community. Unfortunately, none of the elders, with the possible exception of brethren Mitchell and Cummins, are within that group and only about one-half of the deacons.

There are no serious clashes among the members, even though there is a definite feeling between those who are spiritually involved in soul winning and teaching and those who are concerned about only material aspects of the work such as budget, building, grounds, etc.

I have felt complete freedom to preach my convictions on every subject from race prejudice to worldliness. I have publicly criticized our elders. They have, on occasion, suggested that I should come to them first with these matters, which may not be bad advice; but I know of no sensitive areas as long as you are speaking God's word.
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The elders will give you relative freedom in the pulpit. They hesitate to criticize any sermons and will endorse all our "traditional" positions; however, one of the glaring weaknesses of my own work here has been my inability to help our elders mature spiritually. They just will not know what to say on most matters and will leave you entirely free to preach what you believe is Biblical.

I am sure I am prejudiced about attitudes or situations that need immediate attention. I think I had rather leave that to your discretion. I am sure there will be glaring weaknesses that you will immediately notice. We are in the midst and have had adopted by the Personal Work and Visitation Committee a program for checking member attendance and a method for visiting in the homes of all delinquent members with the plan ultimately calling for disfellowshipping of all unfaithful members. The committee is dedicated to this but have waited to present it to the elders, to whom it will be a great shock, until you arrive, have examined the plan, made any desired suggestions, and pledge your support of this procedure.

Cookeville is a town of 13,000 by our latest count with seven congregations within the immediate area. Collegeside seems to be awaking and Willow Avenue has had an excellent work. With this congregation moving ahead as it has, it has been impossible to prevent friction among the members and congregations. We are in full cooperation and, I believe, can have a very pleasant relationship. The very spirit of competition that naturally arises has been difficult to cope with; yet, there is a tacit acceptance in the community of this congregation's primary leadership role among other congregations.

The leaders of the congregation have little understanding of the essential nature of the Church. They need spiritual maturity badly. The elders have never felt an obligation to discipline and spiritually lead the membership. The congregation has always operated under a "pastor system." They make excellent and sufficient business decisions about the material aspects of the work but rarely discuss personal souls who need help. This very condition has begun to create a real tension between the elders and deacons or between those who are coming to an understanding of their responsibilities and those who aren't. I frankly believe that the proposal mentioned earlier from the Personal Work and Visitation Committee, when fully presented Biblically and logically, could be an excellent opportunity to call for the resignations of several of our elders who have refused thus far to involve themselves in the spiritual conditions of the membership.
I have made many mistakes with the congregation. One of the elders, Brother Arnold Carter, believes strongly that I have not kept faith with the group, that I have not been true to my word regarding out of town commitments, etc. You will hear many criticisms of my work and will probably face almost immediate questions regarding your attitude toward the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a subject of current study in our Wednesday evening adult class. If you are interested in knowing my position about this, I would suggest that you read John Danister's lecture on, "The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit," pages 60-71 of the A.C.C. lectures, 1957. You might also read J. W. Roberts' lecture on, "The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit," pages 299-309, A.C.C. lectures, 1961. This church has had Foy E. Wallace and N. B. Hardeman in twenty-six consecutive meetings during the past years. Brother Wallace "comes through" town occasionally and on one recent trip spoke at our Wednesday evening service in almost open contradiction on this matter of what I had been teaching. Please be assured that I have not forced my convictions but have begged the class to study for themselves and have repeatedly asked them to take notes, especially all the scriptures used and to study for themselves this great subject.

Do not worry about this situation. I do not think it serious even if you happen to disagree with my teaching about it. If serious criticisms or charges should ever arise against me or my work, please feel free to contact me about the matter for clarification or ignore it. You are obviously not expected to work in the ways I have worked, to teach in the manner that I have taught, or to accept methods that I used. I will be praying daily for the work and success of your ministry here.

Fraternally yours,

John Allen Chalk

JAC:mn