

*First Christian Church*

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

326 S. PALMETTO, DAYTONA BEACH, FLORIDA

PARSONAGE  
1110 LIVE OAK

RHODES THOMPSON, JR.  
MINISTER

December 16, 1963

A. O. and Mildred L. Breare, 355 Tarragona Way  
J. A. and Ouida L. Murphy, 1138 Live Oak Avenue  
John J. Trybus, 1122 Live Oak Avenue  
Ellen Kite, 350 Tarragona Way  
Michael Blais, 1130 Live Oak Avenue  
Nelson and Eunice Jennings, 345 Tarragona Way  
Marjorie Stenbridge and Mrs. Rhoda M. Walker, 326 S. Seneca Blvd.  
Mrs. Carrie Pipkin, 325 Tarragona Way  
Glenn Whitesell, 349 Tarragona Way  
James P. Miller, 1166 Australia Avenue  
E. L. and Betty L. Reese, 1124 Orange Avenue

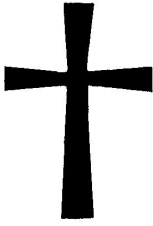
Dear Friends:

One month ago I received your petition in which you shared your complaint with me. Let me express appreciation for the courteous way in which it was expressed. It has deserved a response and I apologize for this delay in so doing; however, I have been giving much thought to the manner and method of my response. Therefore, I trust you will, in return, permit me to share my reaction to your petition.

First of all, although your petition was addressed to me personally, it was handed by Nelson Jennings to the chairman of the official board of my church at its monthly general meeting on November 14, 1963. My first chance to know of it, other than by rumor, or to give consideration to its words was in its open reading to all who were present at that meeting (some 30 persons). This seemed to me a violation of the courteous, personal terms in which the petition had been phrased, and an action which I believe most of you would not have endorsed. Since Nelson Jennings revealed to our board that he had not originated this petition, had simply assisted an unnamed person who had taken the initiative on this matter, and had been delegated to deliver this petition, I do not know who was responsible for the decision to deliver the petition to our general board. Nevertheless, I think it is only fair that you who signed the petition know how it finally was delivered to me. I might add that, following its reading, the question was raised in our meeting as to why this petition had been read to our board when it was addressed to me. Since our board had reaffirmed in October our church's long-standing tradition of a free pulpit (in which I am under obligation to speak the truth as God gives me to see it), a free pew (in which each worshipper has the equivalent right to dissent or disagree with any utterance from the pulpit), and a free parsonage (in which I am free to invite whomever I wish to come for counseling, or religious activities, or personal visiting), and since your petition was addressed, not to our board, but to me personally, our board handed the petition to me to be disposed of in accordance with my own discretion and judgment.

Second, your petition states that "from observations" you have noted that my home is being used for "social gatherings of racially mixed groups." This leads me to wonder if any one of you has ever seen any Negroes enter my home. No doubt you know they have done so, for I so informed my congregation in several signed editorials

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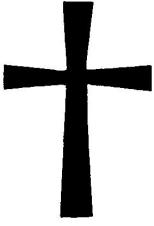
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in my church paper. However, other than those of you who receive our church newsletter, "The Friendly Voice", did the rest of you have an opportunity to read those articles which reported on the purpose and the results of the two such meetings which were held in our home? Far from being mere "social gatherings", these were deeply religious meetings, opened with prayer and meditation and conducted in the interest of establishing communication and friendship among Christians, created by the same God, committed to the same Savior and different only in terms of the quantity of pigments in our skin. As those entrusted by Christ with a "ministry of reconciliation" I know of no more deeply religious task in which we could be involved in these days so filled with bitterness and hatred. Perhaps some of you signed on the basis of inadequate information about the nature and purpose of our "Project Friendship" meetings - or on the basis of appeals based on other emotion-laden matters.

Third, you express fear that our meetings do violence to your "traditions"; however, I assume that part of your traditions are American, thereby steeped in the ideology of The Declaration of Independence and The Constitution, and also Christian, thereby permeated with the spirit and teachings of Jesus and the New Testament. As such, I assume that you, like us, share a commitment to "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." In face of the human relations situation which prevails in our land today, I cannot believe that any of you wants, deliberately or consciously, to make it worse, or that you have no desire to do anything constructive at all. Therefore, it would be my assumption that each of you is concerned to do something to improve this situation and to strengthen our nation. If I am correct in assuming the best about you, our present disagreement lies in the ways and means whereby each of us feels he or she can best serve God and our country. I would genuinely appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you the positive alternatives which are available to us as Americans and Christians in face of the challenges of our day, which leads me to make a fourth observation and to extend an invitation.

Fourth, your petition has prompted some real self-searching relative to my relationship with you, my neighbors. We, too, love the Highlands area, and our relationship with our neighbors here has been an altogether satisfying one for over five years now. However, somewhere we have failed to convey to you the fact that our home is always open to our friends and that we appreciate your personal visits and your honest sharing of any concerns you might have with us. The fact that you felt the necessity to consult a lawyer and have him draft a petition to be delivered to me rather than coming in person to talk about these matters causes me to be concerned that I have not established a friendlier basis of communication with each one of you. Nevertheless, it is never too late to make a fresh start, and there could be no better season than Christmas to begin; therefore, Lois and I extend to each of you a most cordial invitation to come to our home this Thursday, December 19, at 8:00 p.m., for an evening of friendly conversation. It is our idea that this evening not be devoted to argument or debate but rather to quiet listening to one another's points of view, in the hope that we might come to understand and appreciate each other the more.

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And out of such an evening perhaps may come the basis for a better neighborhood, community, nation and world. I think it would provide a wonderful opportunity for honoring Him whose birth the angels announced with the joyful refrain, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased."

Please call Lois at home (CL 3-4245) or me at the church office in the mornings (CL 2-6648) to tell us if we can expect you as our guests at the parsonage this Thursday night at 8:00 o'clock.

For now, every best wish to all of you for a joyful Christmas season!

Truly

Rhodes Thompson, Jr.

RT/f

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