Dear Detroit Congregation, God's Peace.

I am sorry I could not be at this discussion to personally express my thoughts and concerns about our board and congregation considering cancelling Phil Alajoki's speaking trip here this Friday. I pray that God and His Word and Spirit will guide your discussion.

As you may know, the board was informed by Paul Honkala and Julie at our board workshop on September 15 that they had heard a presentation by Jim Franti at which Jim had expressed there were some concerns for Wolf Lake and certain speakers were trying to make the way to heaven wider. We also heard that Phil Alajoki, a speaker in Wolf Lake, had been told by the Cokato church board, through George Koivukangas, that he was no longer invited to speak at a rotational service in Cokato. Based on hearing these things, Paul and Julie relayed concerns about Phil coming to serve Detroit's congregation for our Youth Days October 5-7.

The board discussed these concerns and thought it would be appropriate to discuss what had happened in Cokato with Phil and Eric Jurmu and/or Jim Franti. Paul tried to reach Eric/Jim at the meeting, but was unable to. I was asked to call Eric and Phil after the meeting.

I called Phil that evening. I told him that we had heard at our board workshop that he had been asked not to speak in Cokato. Phil mentioned to me that he had not heard from us regarding his upcoming trip until about a week and a half prior to our conversation and wondered with some anxiety whether Detroit, too, would cancel his trip. I asked him if he knew the reasons why Cokato had disinvited him. Phil told me that George Koivukangas showed up unannounced at his workplace to tell him that the Cokato board had sent him to tell him he was no longer invited to speak there. Phil said he asked George what Cokato's concerns were and was told that he was associating with false preachers and teaching false doctrine. Phil told me he asked George to discuss Cokato's concerns, but George spoke only briefly with him – 20-30 minutes – before leaving. Phil expressed that the meeting and George's refusal to discuss Cokato's concerns troubled him. Since that time, the Wolf Lake Board and congregation discussed this matter with Phil and reassured him that he was in the love of the congregation and believing correctly. The Wolf Lake board wrote to the Cokato board requesting that they write back articulating their doctrinal concerns about Phil.

Before calling Eric, I prayed and pondered the purpose of calling. It bothered me that I should call another believer to ask what was going on with Phil and whether we should consider cancelling him. In the end, I did not believe that it was appropriate. The next day, Sunday, I asked the board if we could meet briefly. I told them how I felt about calling Eric and my decision not to do so. We discussed the matter again and decided that Phil should be welcome. Julie was asked to reach out to him to arrange his travel.

The following Sunday, I was informed that Paul Honkala had spoken again with Jim Franti and that the board should meet again to discuss Phil – and whether or not he should still be invited to come serve at Detroit Youth Days. We met this past Wednesday evening. Paul Honkala stated

that he had spoken with Jim Franti and Jim had recommended that we disinvite Phil. The majority of our board ultimately thought that this would be appropriate until such time as the issues between the Cokato board and Phil were resolved.

No one on the board described any concern about how Phil believes or what he preaches. No one else on the board has called Phil. No one has spoken with him. No one knows the reasons that the Cokato board, through one of its members, told Phil he was not invited to speak there. Yet, now we are prepared to tell him that he is not welcome to come to Detroit to preach God's Word because we are told there is a "cloud" over him.

If this cloud is a matter of personal offense between Phil and any other person or persons, we know that the Bible teaches us the matter should be kept between Phil and the offended. If it is a doctrinal difference between Phil and the Cokato board or certain members of that board, those doctrinal differences should be articulated and then discussed. It appears that other congregations do not share the same concern about the "cloud" over George Koivukangas; he continues to serve other congregations freely.

I believe ardently that if there are doctrinal differences, as Cokato asserts, we must first examine what those differences are so that we may know if we believe the same way as Phil or as the Cokato board, or perhaps neither, regarding those doctrinal matters. It concerns me deeply that we might prefer peace over truth – that instead of learning of and studying the doctrinal questions that are raised so that we can reaffirm the foundation of our personal faith, we would purposely avoid the issues and exhort others to solve them quickly so that we may comfortably continue to invite speakers from other congregations to serve here.

Phil is a dear believing brother in faith. He is in the love of his local congregation and none of us has identified concerns in his preaching. Though I desire to be in unity with our board, I do not believe it would be right to tell Phil he is not welcome now to speak here. I do not think having Phil speak here as scheduled will cause confusion. Again, God's Word does not confuse. We can be open and free to discuss how we believe with Phil and ask him how he believes. We can trust that God's Word and the Holy Spirit will guide our study and discussion of these important issues.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God." John 1:1.

God's Peace,
Briar