



Dear Dad,

When the gangs chased Tony home every day, and his mother was getting no response from the school or the police, I knew what to do. For years I observed you skillfully engaging Chicago's media to accomplish good. Not only did we get Tony transferred to a safer school after the system had said it was impossible, but because of a *Chicago Tribune* columnist's national syndication, concerned families from across the country offered to have Tony come and live with them.

When Queer Nation and Act Up arrived with plans to take over our Easter service as they had done at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, I knew what to do. Back in the 1960s when revolutionaries threatened to take over church services, you came up with a plan. How was I to know that I would successfully execute the same plan at our church in the 1990s? We maintained control of our service, loving and witnessing to the would-be disruptors even as seven of them were arrested.

When neighborhood violence began to crescendo causing the entire city to shake its head in despair, I knew what to do. I watched you address community issues with creativity and courage. We met the challenge head-on, resulting in the voice of compassionate Christian courage being heard across the metropolitan area, and gang leaders were set back on their heels.

After 78 years of life, including 55 years (so far) of pastoring Ashburn Baptist Church of Chicago, your character is blameless. Your name is unsullied. My mother is still your wife, thank you, and she is the Proverbs 31 woman. Your children live lives of hard work, productivity and resilience; guided by the values you instilled in us.

I learned how to be a Christian from you. I learned how to be a man from you. I learned how to be a pastor from you. You have always done what was biblical, appropriate, relevant and helpful. If some of the pastor-brethren didn't understand your use of the Lord's Prayer and the Doxology in the morning service as you tried to reach Roman Catholics and Lutherans, you didn't allow their comments to dissuade you from your path. I learned expository preaching from you. In an age when you can hardly find an evening service, our packed out Sunday Nite Live is modeled after what I saw you do.

I love you for being a godly husband, a great dad, a courageous, compassionate man and an exemplary pastor. I admire you for your integrity, your humility and your heart for people. I hold you in high esteem for being a Baptist. In the North! Also, for being a sensible separatist, and for your unwavering commitment to the word of God through decades of social and cultural upheaval and spiritual compromise. You are my hero, my model. I honor you above all men.

The city is one of your great gifts to me. All of your living, all of your serving, all of your pastoring has been done in one of the world's great metropolitan areas. Here, in the context of seething city life, you have modeled manhood, fatherhood, effectiveness, fearlessness and fruitfulness. You were giving me the city when we rode the elevator to the top of the Prudential Building, then Chicago's tallest building. Even as I gazed across the urban landscape with a child's eyes, God was drawing me to my life's work. You gave me the city when you took me on errands downtown, riding the swaying "El" through the teeming South side, the A-train tracks mere feet from the back porches of thousands of Black-Belt residents.

You gave me the city on a bitter Chicago night when we ran from the car up a windswept street in Little Mexico to have a Mexican meal in an unheated storefront restaurant. You gave me the city on those visits to First Church of Deliverance, the huge African-American church with the phenomenal choir. The throbbing energy of downtown and the broken bleakness of swollen slums all ringed by tidy, bungalows standing at attention up and down the streets of ethnic enclaves is an amazing, dramatic gift.

I am deeply grateful for this gift. You have given me a great metropolitan mission field, millions of people loved by God, needing to hear. Your heart for God, His word, His church and His city became my heart. What more could a son ask for? Happy Father's Day.

Love,  
Charles