As members of the Official Board I am taking you into my confidence to discuss our present situation as I should like to discuss it were we permitted to sit down and talk the matter over face to face.

I

We have certain outstanding assets at this church that ought to make us very proud and that also confer upon us great obligations.

1. We have an excellent physical plant. Our church auditorium is the best that I know in all our connections. The church is exceptionally well located. I am acquainted with the downtown city churches of Methodism, and this, with possibly one exception, is the best located one of them all. We have a staff of unusual devotion and consecration. Our choir leader and choir rank at the top. We have visitors that move through our congregation like a rich and rare perfume. It is my opinion that the membership of First Methodist Church has the best pastoral oversight of any downtown church in Methodism. This is not due to the pastor, but to those associated with it. There is not a member of the staff that is not earnest and devoted to the task.

In addition to this, we have an Official Board that I think is possibly above the average in devotion and loyalty. Of course, as all large Boards, it has among its membership those who do not take the task seriously. But on the whole, the men are of high character and possessed of genuine love and loyalty for the church.

We have a membership that includes the cross section of humanity. It is not made up of one class, but of all classes.
This is as it should be. My first ministry included three of the college churches. In ministering to these, I was ministering largely to one group, one class of people. Here we have the privilege of ministering to all classes. We can thrill of the fact that according to Scriptures, "The rich and poor meet together and the Lord is the maker of them all." Ours, therefore, are unusual opportunities. They bring with them naturally unusual obligations.

II

Now, I am going to ask you to honestly face with me what we are doing these these great privileges. I could enumerate countless helpful tasks, but I think it well for us to face our partial failures.

1. As to the Sunday-school. The first Workers' Council that I attended after becoming your pastor - I was a bit surprised to note the fact that you had a net loss in your Sunday-school the year previous to my coming of some three hundred. But this did not greatly disturb me. I recognized that much of it was due to economic conditions, to the fact that to save money, many children were going to suburban churches. Then, too, I was optimistic enough to believe that with the enthusiasm generated by a new pastor this might change. I had seen such a thing happen before. But my expectations in this respect have been disappointing. Our Sunday-school is slowly but surely decreasing year by year. This is true not of one department but of practically every department. There are two classes that I could mention, but will not, where this is not the case. This constant decrease is a matter to give us who are interested in the church much serious thought and searching of heart.
2. During the two years and more that I have been pastor, our congregations have not increased. On the contrary, there has been a decrease so far as the night services are concerned. This fact has been and is a matter of most tremendous concern to me personally. By far the greater part of my ministry has been spent in a downtown city church. I have discovered, as you have doubtless done, that a downtown church cannot prosper without a successful night service. A congregation that is dwindling will dwindle more. A congregation that is growing will grow from more to more. Much depends on the type of preaching that is done at the night services, but far more depends on the presence and enthusiastic report of the congregation.

3. The night services are in a special sense the evangelistic services of the church. It is the best opportunity that the downtown church has for recruiting. But ours in that respect has not been a distinguished success. So far the church as more than held its own in point of membership, but during the last four months we have lettered more than twice as many out as we have received. That, I dare say, has never happened in this church before. Certainly it has never happened in my ministry before.

III

From all this it is evident that we are failing to accomplish as a church what we ought to accomplish, and what we must accomplish if we remain a growing institution and if we discharge our ministry to the city of which we are a part. I am not mentioning these things to discourage you. I have not mentioned them to rebuke you. The rebuke might be sharper for me than for you. I mentioned them in order to
call you with myself courageously to face the facts. We are not of those who care to live in a fool's paradise. We do not wish to cry, "Peace! peace!" when there is no peace. We will not refrain from seeing a physician for fear he might tell us that we are suffering from some deadly disease. We rather diagnose our own case in order to find a remedy.

What is the remedy? Certainly it is not the coward's remedy of quitting. I know that a deep and desperate need has a definite effect on different individuals. There are those that run from it. There are those that say, "I will get out while the getting's good." There are others that will face up to it. I am counting on your being of that kind.

Let me say further that we are not going to win by simply doing as we have always done. This church faces a far harder situation than it faced before the depression. Therefore, if we accomplish as much as was accomplished in other days, it is going to be at the price of a greater effort. If our ex is a bit duller, there is nothing to do but to hit harder and longer.

Now, since it is necessary to do more than we have been accustomed to do, we must be willing to pay the price. Our responsibilities are too vastly important for us to trifle with them. We must at all cost have a conquering and growing church. Yet, if I were to cease to be your pastor tonight, I should leave with the heart-breaking conviction that I had left you possibly weaker as a church than I found you. That, no sincere pastor is willing to do. I would rather succeed on a Circuit than to fail at Westminster Abbey.
To change our failing situation into one of victory, I am going to suggest three things.

1. You can make it your business to attend upon the services of the church. There have been times when your constant attendance was not necessary, now it is, and don't misunderstand me as to think I am inviting you just to hear me preach. I don't blame you in the least for preferring to stay at home on Sunday night. What I am saying is this - that the Sunday night service is your business just as much as it is my business. And if you are not going to help me make it a success, we had better abandon the enterprise.

The second thing you can do is to invite others to attend. In the early days of Christianity, that which made this new religion to sweep over the Roman world like a forest fire was not the pulpit but the pew. There are men who work with you. There are men who work for you. There are men with whom you associate every day who desperately need your personal touch. If you would share your religion with them, it would be their salvation, and would greatly enrich your own personal life.

While I was preaching in Athens recently I came to know one of the leading business men of the city. He taught a large Sunday-school class. He was interested in all the civic enterprises of the city. When the meeting closed, he asked for the privilege of driving me to Atlanta. On the way he told me that in spite of all his business speaking that the old joy in Christ had gone out of his life, and he had lost his peace, and he said in searching my heart for the reason I have some to the conclusion that it is because I have some half a dozen men or more working for me, and I have never
talked to them about the thing in which I claim to be most vitally interested.

The final thing you can do is to pray for our services, and for our church. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Paul believed that the lowest slave in all the Roman Empire could anoint his own lips with grace and power by praying for it. Therefore, I am asking for our church and for ourselves a daily interest in your prayers. If we will do this, it will bring about a revival of the most sane and genuine type. If we will do this it will change our services from the ordinary into the radiant and the beautiful and the victorious. If we will do this, any stranger who steps into our services, morning or evening, will be constrained to say, "Surely God is in this place."

If you fail, you will have missed the opportunity of giving to your city the most fascinating and attractive something in all the world, the church enthusiastic and alive with the light of God.