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LETTER TO MY FAMILY

February, 2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

Time flies; it's time to write again. How's everybody doing in the New Year? As the years go by, I've come to a deeper understanding of Moses' Psalm 90 "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." How precious is the time we get to spend with one another in our church family! None of us knows what tomorrow brings. We should be grateful for the time we have now.

In the past month, I was sick for three weeks. I caught a cold that came with non-stop coughing. Brothers and sisters showed me how much they cared with all sorts of medicine. One Sunday before the start of the service, a sister came forward and stuffed a little foil packet into my hand. When I opened it I found a tiny black ball with a strong medicinal smell. Just by its smell, I knew it's good stuff! I quickly put it into my mouth; it melted slowly and had a hint of bitter sweet taste. It not only soothed my throat but also warmed my heart. Loving care within the church family is more precious than the medicine. We need it for our hearts more so than our bodies. Some good medicine or a few caring words can bring such affection to God's family. I have heard of a Chinese saying: "Caring words can warm one's heart in coldest winters, but one will shiver in hottest summers from harsh comments." Proverbs also tell us: "Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up." When we care for our brothers and sisters in our church family – with caring, encouraging words and a helping hand in times of need – we can be a more loving community. In Matthew 25 Jesus told his disciples about the separation of the goats and the sheep upon His return. What men see as insignificant things bring pleasure to God: a few gentle words, a glass of thirst-quenching water, a warm coat, or a kind visit. Things such as these are more precious than any sacrificial offering. Brothers and sisters, are you willing to make a New Year resolution before God? Will you seek opportunities each week to express kindness, say a few caring words, offer a glass of water and pray for others, thus making this a warm, caring place?

There is this little incident from many years ago that is etched deep in my heart. In those days, my church was going through difficulties dealing with internal problems. Church leaders were having a hard time tackling problems arising from interpersonal relationships-----one of the biggest challenges for church pastors. As their pastor, I found myself stuck in the middle, not pleasing either side. One Saturday, I endured a long and painful mediation meeting; however the problems seemed to have grown even more complicated. This is typical for interpersonal conflicts – they can easily grow out of proportion. After the meeting, I was sitting in my car, holding my head in despair. All of a sudden someone knocked on the window. It was a little girl.

When I rolled down the window, the little girl smiled and handed me a piece of paper. Below the yellow smiley face were the words “Smile, Jesus loves you!” She walked away without saying a word. That smiley face pulled me out of my misery.

I would also like to share a story about a bowl of wonton noodles with you. Since I was young, I have always loved the taste of Hong Kong style wonton noodles. In 1991, I started to serve in a church in Hawaii. If you had visited Hawaii, you would know how beautiful Hawaii is. There are many Chinese restaurants in Hawaii as the island is well populated with Chinese. Those restaurants make wonton noodles as good as those in Hong Kong. During those years, I focused on college student ministry and we baptized between 50 to 80 college students every year.

College ministry involves more work than other ministries as different student issues must be dealt with. We organized a variety of events as college students love activities. They are also night owls and as a result I used to work late into the night in the church office. One evening, I was so engrossed in my work that I forgot to have dinner. Our church office was essentially a tumbledown little house near the university district. The front door could never be shut. My office was the smallest room of all. I was very hungry and as I opened my door I thought, the best thing that could happen to me right now would be to have a bowl of wonton noodles.

Unbeknownst to me, someone left a plastic container by the door. Attached to the container was a note with my name on it. I opened the container and the aroma of wonton noodles filled the room. I chowed down the wonton noodles in no time. I had never felt so blessed in my life. My blessing did not come in the form of the wonton noodles but from a caring brother or sister. I never found out who brought me that mysterious bowl of wonton noodles, but till today it is kept hidden deep in my heart after over twenty years.

Jesus says, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

(Matthew 25: 35-36, 40)

Serving with you in the name of the Lord,

*Pastor Calvin Tran*