



Dear brothers and sisters,

March 2017

Winter will be over soon and Spring is creeping upon us. God has blessed us with a mild winter filled with a lot of sunshine and very little rain. Site work for the construction of the new church buildings has made great progress, and the City of Cary has issued the permit to proceed with the construction. As we see the new building start to take shape, we not only need to thank the members of our building committee, but also give glory to our Lord.

As the construction of the new building is progressing, a more pressing issue is the spiritual well-being of the church. In 1 Corinthians 3:6, the Apostle Paul said, “I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God gave the increase.” Using plants as an example, Paul mentioned that man has to do his part, but ultimately it is God who grows the church. Paul also used construction to illustrate the growth of a church. “In the measure of the grace given to me, I, as a wise master-builder, have put the foundation in position, and another goes on building on it. But let every man take care what he puts on it. For there is no other foundation for the building but that which has been put down, which is Jesus Christ. But on the foundation a man may put gold, silver, stones of great price, wood, dry grass, cut stems; Every man's work will be made clear in that day, because it will be tested by fire; and the fire itself will make clear the quality of every man's work. If any man's work comes through the test, he will have a reward.” *1 Corinthians 3:10-14*. Gold, silver, and stones of great price are only possible through the love of God, which has all the right intentions. Wood, dry grass, cut stems are from the works of Man, which have all the wrong intentions. “He has made clear to you, O man, what is good; and what is desired from you by the Lord; only doing what is right, and loving mercy, and walking without pride before your God.” *Micah 6:8*. Walking with God, treating others with mercy, are more important than offerings.

As the new building is approaching completion, I am deeply moved by Paul’s message from 1 Corinthians 3:10-14. Our church is at a critical point in which we must rely on God to move past the growth “bottleneck” that has plagued us for the past ten years. While praying earnestly, we must also be on the lookout for Satan’s attempts to divide the church. Paul encouraged people in the church to have a heart of unity which is from the Holy Spirit. Building new facilities is a critical moment for us, because it is the time when the devil’s attacks are the most serious. If the devil can create a rift within us, then our church will be broken. Then the new buildings will become a laughingstock of others if the church is divided. People within our church originate from many different cultures, which will result in differences of opinions. Differences of opinions will lead to conflict. However, if conflict is handled properly, we will gain better mutual understanding, which can lead to healthier relationships within our congregations. This reminds me of sea glass that is usually found on the beach.

Let me tell you a story about sea glass. From childhood I have always been fascinated by the sea glass that can be found on the beach near my home. I consider sea glass is one of the treasures given to us from the sea. I consider the sea as a boundless treasure chest with thousands of treasures inside. I can never forget my four years of stay at the college which was located by the sea. The sea was like a magnificent painter who is creative with colors and layouts. The image that it projected was awe-inspiring no matter when the sea was calm or turbulent. The sun was extremely radiant when it rose like a fireball out of the sea. When the sun set, the colors it radiated were beyond description. The retreating tide would bring forth wonderful treasures from the bottom of the sea and laid them out on the beach. Not only were there beautiful sea shells, there was also brown or dark green sea glass.

Recently, I traveled back to New Jersey for a prayer conference organized by the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which was held in a hotel in Ocean Grove. During my lunch break, I visited a sea shell store. After strolling around for five minutes, I was deeply disappointed because all the sea shells were cheap imports from the Philippines or Indonesia. I asked the store owner to see if they sold any sea shells that were collected near Ocean Grove. The store owner explained that since there were no local scuba divers, therefore it was impossible to collect sea shells locally. She then pointed to a small basket with some sea shells that were collected from beach locally. I picked through the basket, and found that most shells in it were “dead shells” with no gloss. At the bottom of the basket, however, I found a few pieces of sea glass!

Sea glass comes from glass bottles that people throw into the sea. Then, these bottles are shattered when coming into collision with coral reefs. The resulting glass pieces are eroded continuously by the sea through hydraulic forces. After many years of erosion, these pieces lose all their sharp edges and glossiness. In the end, these pieces are dark in color and extremely round, which is what people refer to as sea glass. Sea glass has a unique attractiveness. Take a look at it, we will surely be fascinated by its inner beauty.

Brothers and sisters, difficulties in life and conflicts we may have with one another are like sea waves that transform broken glass into beautiful sea glass. These difficulties and conflicts are not pleasant to bear but will develop deeper Christian character in us. In the end, our lives will be just as beautiful as sea glass in the eyes of the Lord.

In Him,

*Rev. Calvin Tran*