

1 Corinthians 3:10\_11 New Revised  
Standard Version (NRSV)

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 ... God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

21 So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Here is the church.  
Here is the steeple.  
Open the doors....

The Message

Or, to put it another way, you are God's house. Using the gift God gave me as a good architect, I designed blueprints; Apollos is putting up the walls. Let each carpenter who comes on the job take care to build on the foundation! Remember, there is only one foundation, the one already laid: Jesus Christ.

6\_17 You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God himself is present in you? .... God's temple is sacred—and you, remember, are the temple.

21\_23 I don't want to hear any of you bragging about yourself or anyone else. Everything is already yours as a gift—Paul, Apollos, Peter, the world, life, death, the present, the future—all of it is yours, and you are privileged to be in union with Christ, who is in union with God.

And see all the people.

For hundreds of years, church has been a spiritual and social hub in many communities. People's faith was what guided their choices and their lives. They understood the world and how it worked through the lens of faith, under the leadership of their priests. We can hear the language of faith reflected in many of today's city charters that communicates a sense of unity and oneness with all life...with all beings. Our Christian faith, inspired by the ministry and message of Jesus, has been instrumental in people's lives for 2000 years, and will continue to have influence for many more years.

Here in this place, we have a strong foundation grounded in our faith. We take seriously Jesus' call to honor and serve God by being of service to others. We are generous and give each year to several different causes that are important to us. And when there's an emergency, we step up... Last week we gave \$1500 to the conference Disaster Response Fund because of the devastation of the Valley and Butte fires.

We have strong connections to each other, many of them built and nurtured by working side by side on various community projects. These friendships run deep and many folks connect outside of church, out side of our outreach activities.... with potluck groups and trips for fun.

At the same time, some have said this place - Christ Church - is one of the best-kept secrets in Santa Rosa. That is actually not something to be proud of. We want the feelings we have for each other and our commitment of service to ring loud and clear for the mountaintops.

Many, many mainline Protestant churches are feeling the sting of dwindling numbers. So we are not alone. This reality reflects a cultural shift away from church participation.

What we also hear is that too many see the hypocrisy of Christian church played out loudly and often in the media. There are followers of Jesus who fight hard to exclude some people from the church.... our LGBTQ brothers and sisters, the homeless, immigrants and others are often shunned by folks who claim Christianity as their faith. Our own denomination certainly has some work to do to truly live the motto, "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors." Christ Church is an open, welcoming church. We want be of service to the "least" of these, our brothers and sisters.

We don't want to be the best-kept secret. We are active in the community. We are working with others for justice. Some of our members attend city council and county supervisor meetings to stand up and be counted for certain issues. Our Website and a Facebook page are current. We have gotten some good press. We have great t-shirts to wear when we are out in the community. We want to be seen and heard and recognized as voices for love and justice.

We understand the call to actively invite others to join us in our community efforts, or in our social and musical events. And even more is needed. Someone told me recently that she was thinking about this and realized almost all of her local friends here in Sonoma County already go to Christ Church, or they have their own church, or they have no interest in being part of a church. I think her comments would probably be true for many of us.

So what do we do with this? This is our big question and our challenge.

We are builders. "Each builder must choose with care how to build on the God-Foundation." We have built and rebuilt Christ Church, and crafted our mission based on Jesus' calling. We have a firm foundation. Now we are being charged to discover what is needed to build up our church again. One reason this is difficult is that we are trying to build based on what we know from our past. The same activities and efforts that worked 30+ years ago will not today. "If you build it, they will come." is not true. We have a wonderful building and well cared for grounds and several powerful ministries. We need to go out on a very different limb and try some radically new ideas. And we don't necessarily have those ideas in mind, because our ideas are shaped by our experiences

Jesus didn't say go and build a building. Here is the Church, Here is the steeple, Open the doors.... and see all the people. Jesus and his disciples were seen out there in the towns and villages. They were at the well. They were on the hillside. They were out among the people.

The Good News.... the message that we carry with us wherever we go... is that God loves us. We belong to God. Our lives are rich and full and joyous because we don't lose sight of this. Sadly, too many folks today are rudderless... they are hungry for seeking a spiritual connection and sometimes find it or facsimiles in other ways and places that are not church.

So - How can we bring others in to share in our commitments to serve. Who might we invite to join us? Are we willing to listen to new voices and do things differently than we've always done them?

Virginia Satir, a renowned author, social worker and family therapist, valued and advocated for the importance of human connection. She spoke of a formula to express how important that connection goal is. She said we need 12 hugs a day. How many of us meet this daily? I imagine many of us are often in a deficit.... She felt we needed 4 hugs every day for survival, 4 more for maintenance, and 4 more for growth. Of course, this is not a real requirement or formula, but a way of realizing the importance of connection and love and being valued and sharing the load of life with others.

This came to mind for me this week when I was thinking about where we are here at Christ Church. Many of us realize that we have been through a few rough years recently, with changes in pastoral leadership. For a time, we were struggling with survival... we held on to each other and worked together to heal from the hurts and challenges of those times. This helped to make us stronger. We metaphorically needed a minimum of 4 hugs.... or strong connections with each other and we delivered. Because of the support we have given, I believe much of that struggle for survival and the hurts we felt are well on their way to healing. And we have been working on maintenance and moving into revival. I have really been touched by all the ways that folks have stepped up to do the work here of being Christ Church, and continuing to support each other, and do God's work in so many different ways. I know I couldn't do what I'm doing as your Lay Pastor without all the help I get every week. Carol-Jean joined our team last year, and has brought her gifts to us. You all are awesome. We have been going through our midpoint, maintenance period with grace .... symbolizing 4 more hugs given and received each day.

We need other people of course.... for survival. We are not meant to move through this life alone. And we need each other to maintain our lives, with all the demands of every

day and the work of doing the best we can in the world.

But growth, true growth and an expansive, thriving existence requires even more. We need creativity. We need openness and willingness to try new things, and see new possibilities. We also need to be willing to change. True growth doesn't really happen without some upheaval and shaking things up.

"The times they are a changin'." To move into a stronger future, we are being asked to adapt and expand. We know that at some point, we will get new pastoral leadership. We need to open ourselves to new ways of being. People still rely on their faith today to get them through tough times. Many of them don't need the church building and structure for this. How can we help people who aren't already here feel like this is their church, even if not very often on Sunday mornings.... so that when they do need to lean on their faith and a faith community, they'll know we are here for them?

So, it seems to me, we are being called to move outside our buildings even more. Sunday morning worship is very meaningful to us or we wouldn't be here. We need to be wherever folks today find their meaning. How can we be there, to greet them, and share our faith?

We're going to have a conversation right after worship. I hope you'll grab something to drink and eat and join me right here. We need all our creativity and openness to get out of our comfort zone of the way we've always done things, and see what we might envision for a lasting, thriving future (Virginia Satir's third level of support)

The church is not the building.... the church is the people. We can't just stay in the building and wait for people to come to us and see how great we are.... We are called to take Jesus message of love and connection out into the world? Yes, we are already out there.... and more is being asked of us.

"Don't you know, that you are God's temple? And that God's spirit dwells in you?" We have been nurtured and spiritually fed by our church experiences, and we would like others to feel church is a positive resource. Guided and strengthened by this spirit, we want to share with others so that they too will feel God's love which so richly nourishes us. We know we belong to each other and to God.... and we want others to be comforted by this assurance as well.