

On Tuesday, January 30th we are going to have an Administrative Board meeting. One of the items we are going to talk about is the church facility. We are not only going to talk about routine maintenance type of things, but also updating and “fixin’ up” the place. There are lots of areas that need attention, especially in the fellowship hall building. I can’t stress enough how important it is for us to be proud of our facility. When we walk through these doors we should have a good feeling, and when others come and visit us they should walk away with the impression that we care about God’s building. I’m not really interested in how or why our facility got in the shape that it is in. All I’m interested in is seeing it in the shape it should be in and I know you feel the same way.

Obviously, this is not something that just happens overnight. It would be nice if we could snap our fingers and have a perfect facility with no maintenance issues or need of updating, but that is not realistic. What is realistic, however, is us getting to work and making it happen. Now I have never claimed to be a Mr. Fix It kind of guy. In fact, I am the furthest thing from a Mr. Fix It. My wife and others who know me well would laugh at the site of me with a toolbox in my hand. With that being said, I am going to paint my office. Yes, you heard me right. I’m going to paint my office.

Here is my plan. I’m going to streamline the process. Instead of putting the primer on the walls first, I’m going to mix the primer and the paint and do it all in one step. I don’t have much experience in painting but I figure eliminating the primer phase will save me a lot of time. Granted, there could be some issues with the quality of the paint job if I mix the primer and the paint, but I don’t really care about quality. I just want to get the walls painted as soon as possible. Does anyone here have a problem with this strategy of mine? Am I going about it the wrong way? Of course I am. It would be incredibly stupid to mix the primer and the paint. That’s just not how it’s done. There is a process in painting and part of that process, at least in the case of the office, is to apply the primer first. The walls have to be prepared to receive the paint.

When I think about our church and where we are as a church, it is very similar to the painting project I just described. Right now we are in the “primer” stage. We are preparing our church for growth. We are putting in place people and ministries that will continue to build on the foundation of this great church. I was looking through the glass case in the foyer the other

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day and noticed all the old pictures of the church. I paid particular attention to the people in the pictures. Most of the people in the pictures are no longer with us. They have gone on to be with God in heaven, but what a foundation they have set for us.

Think of all the time, resources, and energy involved in building this church. Maybe you grew up in this church and can remember the names and faces like it was yesterday. There is that Sunday school teacher that just loved you. You could do no wrong in her eyes and every time you stepped through the doors of that Sunday school room you automatically felt better about yourself. Maybe you remember that couple who invited you to church for the first time. You had never been involved in a church, but one day all that changed when they picked you up and brought you to church. In short, that couple changed your life and you will never forget them. If we were to peel back the layers of the foundation of this church we would be here all day. Just think of the lives that have been impacted by this church.

How many people have stood at this altar and said, "I do?" How many parents have held that baby in front of the congregation and promised to raise him or her in a Christian environment? How many people have come forward to give their lives to Christ? How many people have knelt at this communion rail to receive the precious body and blood of Christ? This is sacred ground built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and we are gaining momentum every day. Great things, like this church, have a way of building and gaining momentum. They tend to take on a life of their own.

Speaking of taking on a life of its own, there is a man in Michigan who knows how things can build up over time. Robert Nuranen was looking through a box in his attic when he noticed a book. The name of the book was Prince of Egypt. You might say to yourself, "Big deal! It's just a book." Well, this was no ordinary book. This book was had a 47-year late fee attached to it! Robert had checked the book out of his school library when he was in the ninth grade, only to lose the book. The book, with its last due date stamped June 2, 1960, was part of his fascination with Egypt. As you can imagine, the late fee was sizeable -- \$171.32! But sure enough, Robert Nuranen went to the school librarian and paid his late fee. Sue Zubiena, the librarian, said, "I'm going to use it as an example. It's never too late to return your books."

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The idea of paying a \$171 late fee is not all that appealing, but you see how a little thing can become a Big Thing. I have served four different churches now as a pastor and all four of these churches, ours included, have one thing in common: momentum. Now there is positive momentum and negative momentum. Let me put it to you this way, churches that pray, study the Bible together regularly, and understand that the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ have positive momentum and grow. Churches that don't take seriously prayer, living out of the Word of God, and understanding Jesus Christ as the cornerstone have negative momentum and do not grow. Let me tell you something about this church. We take prayer seriously, we believe in the authority of scripture, and we know who our foundation is built upon.

The church at Corinth needed to be reminded that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone – the foundation. Paul made sure that they understood that they were not worshipping him or any other teacher or pastor. The church, at least in Paul's mind, could be compared to a field. He said, "For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building."

There is a hymn in our hymnal entitled "We Are The Church". It's kind of hokey and not really my favorite hymn, but the words communicate what a church should be:

"I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together!
All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together!
The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people. We're many kinds of people, with many kinds of faces, all colors and all ages, too, from all times and places. Sometimes the church is marching, sometimes its bravely burning, sometimes its riding, sometimes its hiding, always its learning. And when the people gather, there's singing and there's praying, there's laughing and there's crying sometimes, all of it saying: 'I am the church! You are the church. We are the church together! All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together!'"

I love Paul's analogy of a field as the church. We are God's field and in this field we have been given different responsibilities and tasks. One of the dangers of understanding the church as a field is falling into the trap of

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territories and boundaries. We can very easily assume that this part of the “field” is mine.

I’ll never forget what happened one day in the kitchen at a church I once served. We were having a big fund-raiser dinner and there was quite a bit of activity in the kitchen area. It was crowded with people coming and going. One of the ladies working in the kitchen couldn’t take all the commotion and finally blurted out, “Alright! Everyone get out of my kitchen!” You could have heard a pin drop. I ducked my head and stared at a green bean casserole on the counter as everyone filed out of the kitchen. The lady didn’t mean it. She really didn’t think that it was “her” kitchen, but at the same time she did. She had worked in that kitchen for years and served many meals to many different people on many different occasions. It was “her” kitchen. She took pride in it, and for that she should be commended. But where she went wrong was crossing the line between taking pride in what really belonged to God and assuming complete ownership. Needless to say, it took quite a while before anyone volunteered to have anything to do with the kitchen!

It’s not just members of the congregation who are guilty of this kind of thing; pastors can fall into the same trap. The success of the church is measured not in lives that have been transformed, but in how many people we had in our worship service last week. Instead of affirming and praising the work of the faithful members, sometimes pastors, me included, look at the church and wonder why we don’t do this or that and point out every area that needs attention. One of our members had a funny line about this kind of thing. He said, “Some pastors think that Jesus said, ‘Beat my sheep’ instead of ‘Feed my sheep.’” I have certainly been guilty of that a time or two.

I think what we all need to hear today from Paul is that we are all valuable members of the field and whether we are planting or watering; the church should be the one place where we experience grace and forgiveness the most. Of all the organizations and groups we are a part of, the church should be on the top of the list as the one where we feel most welcome and comfortable, but often that is not the case. More often than not we have come to church with high expectations, only to be let down. We came expecting everyone to get along and were disappointed when we realized that is not always the case. We came expecting the pastor to be perfect, only to realize that the he or she is far from it. Pastors do the same thing with the

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church. We want the perfect church that doesn't exist just as much as you want the perfect pastor that doesn't exist. Both of us are misguided.

We are co-workers in **God's** field. The field is not always smooth and sometimes there are disappointments, but it is the best field that I know. It is the field of grace and forgiveness. It is the field of love and mercy. It is a field full of wonderful surprises. It is the field of salvation in Jesus Christ, and whether we are planting like Paul or watering like Apollos, we have the privilege of serving in the greatest field of all. Did you hear me? We have the **privilege** of serving in this field called the church. And in case no one has told you lately, you are an important part of the field and without you it's just not the same.

This last week we have begun emailing our members with email addresses to provide more communication about what is going on at the church. If you have an email address and would like to email it to us, we would gladly receive it and add you to our list. As I was entering in all the email addresses into my email system, I made a mistake. I added a letter to one of the email addresses. When dealing with computers one letter makes a big difference. In this case it meant sending an email to a person who doesn't even belong to the church. This individual emailed me back after receiving one of the emails sent to the whole group. Somehow through the email she got the idea that we were starting a new church. She typed the following message: "Thank you for the email. What kind of church are you starting anyway?"

I don't know about you, but that question will stay with me for a long time.