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Pastoral Letter, May, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It has been a memorable month since we have moved into our new campus on Emery Road. Thank you to the New Building Committee, Board, and all of the brothers and sisters that have helped to make our transition smooth. We are still making adjustments as we learn more about the building and the changes to our ministries, so we thank all of you for your patience and mercy toward one another in this process.

A period of transition like this helps us to remember the nature and diversity of the body of Christ and challenges us to practice genuine love toward one another, as we die to ourselves in order to build up one another. Someone may ask, "How much diversity is there in a Chinese church?" Actually quite a lot. Because of our larger cultural setting, we tend to think of diversity in terms of skin color. However, the truth is that our skin color or race alone doesn't describe each of us accurately; each individual's uniqueness is much more complex than that. So even members of the same race embody a great number of differences. There are differences in personality, traditions, family experiences, education, background, ways of thinking, etc. which further define who we are. When these are taken to account, we understand that there is a great deal of diversity even in a Chinese church.

Such diversity and the size of the church can tempt each of us to find the "group" that is more like me, and settle comfortably there. It's natural for us to do so. On one hand, the more we have in common, the more we feel a sense of belonging to the group, and it is easier to commit to one another. On the other hand, the more we mix with people who are different, the more our comfort zones are threatened. Even for brothers and sisters in the family of God, we may find it easier to isolate ourselves from others (or others from us) in order to avoid that discomfort.

However, we should remember that it is our Lord Jesus Christ who builds His church, and He intentionally builds His church with brothers and sisters who differ. His aim is to sanctify us and grow us into His likeness as we deny ourselves to love one another. Diversity calls for greater self-denial and, therefore, causes us to depend more completely upon Christ so that we may love one another even though it makes us uncomfortable—or worse. But as we submit ourselves to Christ, and trust Him for grace to love even those who are harder for us to love, the Holy Spirit gives us grace to take our self-love to the cross and to give ourselves so that others may know the love of God. When that happens, our brothers and sisters in the Lord are blessed, we grow up in to the likeness of Christ, and God receives the glory He deserves. This is the ordinary life of a disciple of Jesus.

So, may we present ourselves to God to love His church, and reach beyond the comfortable boundaries of "our own group" to extend and experience the love of Christ together. When we do this, Jesus said, "the world will know that you are My disciples" (John 13:35).

Below is a recent reading from Spurgeon's devotional, *Morning and Evening*, that was helpful and encouraging to me. I thought I would pass it on.

Trusting God for self-denying grace with you,

PASTOR HOUSE

"Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins." Psalm 25:18

It is well for us when prayers about our sorrows are linked with pleas concerning our sins—when, being under God's hand, we are not wholly taken up with our pain, but remember our offenses against God. It is well, also, to take both sorrow and sin to the same place. It was to God that David carried his sorrow: it was to God that David confessed his sin. *Observe, then, we must take our sorrows to God.* Even your little sorrows you may roll upon God, for He counts the hairs of your head; and your great sorrows you may commit to Him, for He holds the ocean in the hollow of His hand. Go to Him, whatever your present trouble may be, and you shall find Him able and willing to relieve you. *But we must take our sins to God too.* We must carry them to the cross, that the blood may fall upon them, to purge away their guilt, and to destroy their defiling power.

The special lesson of the text is this: *that we are to go to the Lord with sorrows and with sins in the right spirit.* Note that all David asks concerning his sorrow is, "Consider my affliction and my trouble," but the next petition is vastly more express, definite, decided, plain—"Forgive all my sins." Many sufferers would have put it, "Remove my affliction and my pain, and look at my sins." But David does not say so; he cries, "Lord, as for my affliction and my pain, I will not dictate to Your wisdom. Lord, look at them, I will leave them to You; I should be glad to have my pain removed, but do as You will; but as for my sins, Lord, I know what I want with them; I must have them forgiven; I cannot endure to lie under their curse for a moment." A Christian counts sorrow lighter in the scale than sin; he can bear that his troubles should continue, but he cannot support the burden of his transgressions.

Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (from April 11, evening)