

Building on the Foundation
I Corinthians 3:9-11, 16
February 19, 2017
Rochelle A. Stackhouse

The apostle Paul and his companions, Priscilla, Aquila, Timothy and Phoebe, tried to put together a new congregation in Corinth. As we can tell from the two letters we have, this proved a challenging project. People came from different backgrounds, such as freed slaves from all over the Roman world and the very wealthy business people in this bustling city. They all had different ideas about how a “church” might work. This experiment was a trial at many times!

It's interesting in this part of the first letter that so often Paul uses the word “you” in the plural, something it's hard to get in the English translation since that word in English can be singular or plural. But here in this text it is “we” who are God's servants, and you plural who are God's field, God's building. You plural are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you plural. In our American individualism, sometimes we miss the power that the early Christian leaders placed in community, the sense that the Spirit moves most powerfully in community, not in individuals. Later Paul will use the term “body of Christ” to refer to the community of believers.

Near the end of the letter, before the chapter on love that everyone knows so well, Paul writes about spiritual gifts. He writes that “each is given the Spirit for the common good.” Then he lists all the kinds of gifts given to individuals in the community **to be used for the common good**, like speaking wisely, teaching, healing, interpreting God's word, standing strong in faith. He talks in great detail about the work in the community of teachers, leaders, and prophets.

The details of the creation of the Corinthian congregation came down to what the individual members of it, filled with God's Spirit, and aware of the movement of that Spirit in their lives, brought to the community. If no one brought anything, even the least gift, there would be no community. And the character of the community

only emerged when each person lived out their faith in that community according to their gifts, brought together in the mission to love as God loves. Paul couldn't tell what the Corinthian church would be until it happened. His letters are tweaks to an existing but evolving church to make them better together.

What we are about here is no different. I know that many of us have been impatient to know the details being proposed for a new congregation together. "When are 'they' going to tell us what it will be like?" Well, "they" is "you." You singular and you plural. Today you have some proposals that may feel either too specific or not specific enough. Today we are asking you to talk about those proposals in the context of where you might imagine your gifts, your spirit, your interests, your passions, your resources, your faith, your courage, your love in action, can contribute to the new congregation. That's what will make it what it will be. The foundations have been laid. YOU are building on them. Do you not know that God's Spirit dwells in you? You singular? You plural?

In a moment I will invite you to go out of here singing. Stop at the foundation and the Ebenezer here and place your sticky note. Go to your small group and spend 15 minutes talking together about what needs to happen to put flesh on the bones of these reports, to put walls on the foundations laid in the past and by the foundation that is Jesus. What might worship be like? Teaching and learning and growth in faith for all ages? Community life? Mission, Social Action, Evangelism? What specifically might we be doing together to strengthen the witness of Christ as we understand him in the progressive Protestant Church in this community? What do we, does New Haven, does our country need from us right now and into the foreseeable future. And most important, what specifically might YOU singular contribute to what you plural might be about? Are you interested in working with a group to do outreach to the Yale community? Are you excited about making music? What kind? Are you interested in connecting with community groups and other faith communities on specific projects? Are you eager to see a prayer

ministry start? Do you want to explore incorporating more children and youth into worship? Something not on any paper here?

Take one thing that energizes or interests or compels you which may come out of those conversations or already be in your head and write it down on..... When you come back, we will put some sides to our tent of meeting here!