

INTRODUCTION 引言

A church is like a family in many ways. One thing our church is famous for is the food. We have a professional kitchen with professional chefs who cook professional meals. Not too long ago, we had annual banquets to celebrate the Chinese New Year and Thanksgiving that drew big crowds. Most churches have the highest attendance on Easter and Christmas. But we have the peak turnouts on different days of the year. Having meals together build relationship. Normally, people do not just eat and run, but they chow and chat. There is a saying in my home when the boys were small: “Dinner time is family time.” The dining table is a place for family members to share what is happening in their lives. A church is a spiritual family. We call fellow believers our brothers and sisters. We learn, worship, serve and grow together. In the past twenty months or so, the pandemic has completely changed our life. It affects our church life too. Some believers have never stepped into the church building for all this time. As a pastor, of course I hope everyone will come back in-person. But I also fully respect if anyone is not ready to do so yet. My job is to give you spiritual encouragement and let you decide what is the best for yourself and your family. Regardless, it is a good time for us to re-think God’s heart for the church. What is a church? My definition is this: a church is a living body where Jesus Christ ministers His grace for our spiritual growth.

EXPLANATION 解釋

1. Community 群體

We will ponder on three words in this message. The first word we will consider is “community.” A church is a community of believers. Many people think of **a building** when they hear the word “church.” FCBC is a structure in Cordova where we gather every week. Many members gave sacrificially to buy this land and construct this building. All glory to God! But we can also use **a dining table** to represent a church. Whenever we meet, we are like having a meal together. We cherish our relationship, and we share God’s goodness with each other. As such, a church is not only about each individual, it is also about all of us as a whole. The word “church” in Greek is *ekklesia*, which means “a called-out group.” The name of the book Ecclesiastes is derived from that word, which means a preacher. God calls each of us out from different walks of life to salvation. He also brings you here, and makes you a part of this community. The Bible describes members of a church as members of a human body. For example, Paul says in Ephesians 4:4-6 – **4 There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.** There are seven “ones” in this passage. Those elements are the foundations of our belief. We should cherish our oneness in Christ. We feel safer to mingle with people who are similar to us. The people sitting around you may come from a different background or speak a different mother tongue. But we belong to the same community. They are your family members. We must break the barrier that we only belong to a certain language group. I encourage you to greet anyone you see when you walk around the building. It can be as simple as a “hi,” wave and elbow bump. After all, it is Jesus Christ who binds us together. He had broken the barriers that divide us. Ephesians 2:14-16 read: **14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and**

has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The Jews take pride in themselves as God's chosen people. We are Gentiles too according to the Jews. Jesus paid the penalty for both the Jews and the Gentiles because no one can live up to God's standard. In doing so, Jesus reconciled everyone to Himself. He also reconciled the two groups. He then put all the believers into a new man and a new body called the church. By accepting Jesus by faith, anyone can become a member in God's family. What our Lord has united, let nothing separates us. Once we enter into this church, we are members of this community. Do not let our language, social status, the car we drive or the clothes we wear divides us.

2. Communication 溝通

We belong to the same community. Naturally, relationship between family members should continue to grow. Communication is a key to build relationship. By communication, it is more than talking. It is also interacting with one another. People usually think of a **sanctuary** when they think of a church. Everyone focuses on the podium as worship leaders direct a service. But to enhance our communication, we have to visualize **sitting in a circle**. Being a smaller church gives us an advantage. You cannot just walk in, sit at a corner and walk out at the end of a service without communicating with others. As our relationship grows, we will go deeper than knowing each other's interests, school or work and family. Perhaps we can share about our struggles in life or anxiety about the future. Then you realize that we all have similar burdens. The next step is to show our care. Galatians 6:2 encourages us to: **Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ**. Jesus said God's commands can be summarized by two principles: love God and love others. We love others by carrying their burdens. We can surely exchange tips about how to solve various problems. But God also gives us the privilege to pray. Simply say: "I will pray for you." It is a tangible way to show love. The apostle John says in 1 John 4:7-8 – **7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love**. An apple tree can only produce apples. Likewise, children of the God of love should display love. Before we say we love some unknown people suffering in other parts of the world, we should love the members of our church first. Love has to come with actions. Jesus loved us by dying on the cross. In doing so, He set up an example of sacrificial love. We should love brothers and sisters by sharing our time and resources. Love becomes critical especially when we have different opinions. The safest way to avoid conflict is to hide in a bubble. You come alone and talk to nobody. But that is not the kind of church life God wants us to have. Paul advises us in Ephesians 4:31-32 – **31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you**. The context is about taking off our old self and putting on a new self after we are saved. Holding grudges is what we usually do. To resolve conflict, we must be kind, compassionate and forgiving. We need God's grace to act against our human nature. Paul reminds us to think of Christ. He forgives us completely and unconditionally. He even asked the Father to forgive those who nailed Him to the cross while He was still hanging there! Can anyone commit a bigger sin to you than the way you sin against God? We are talking about a church community here. You will see the same person you choose

not to forgive week after week. That is painful! A better solution is to ask God for grace and courage to reconcile a conflict. Let nothing hinder our communication in Christ.

3. Commitment 委身

Communication is important to build relationship in a faith community. Another key element in a community is commitment. To modern people, commitment is not easy. That is why some people only use their gym membership a few times a month. Most New Year resolutions fail before the end of February. Many Christians see a church as a service-provider like **a fast-food restaurant**. You leave once your needs are met. However, in God's eyes, a church should be like **a family business**. Everyone is part of the team. You roll your sleeves up to contribute to its success. The early church shows us how commitment is like in a faith community. Acts 2:44-46 read: **44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.** Believers stayed together and shared everything. There was a great level of trust. They held meetings daily with joy. Church life was part of their everyday life. Of course, our society is very different now. But do we show a similar commitment to our church? Church attendance is a good indicator. Most churches struggle in the pandemic. The reality is, this virus may forever be with us like the flu. I do not want to judge anyone. But I have concern for those who prefer to stay home. Do our livestream and videos serve their spiritual needs? Are they still in close contact with other brothers and sisters? How is their relationship with the Lord? Hebrews 10:24-25 say: **24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.** I hope that no one becomes those who “give up meeting together.” As far as I know, some members are not regular participants in small group Zoom meetings. How can they build fellowship with others and grow together if they do not show up? It is easy to get complacent and even lazy when there is a lack of mutual encouragement. Make a commitment to join us. Show your care to others when you do not see them in-person or on a screen. Life is a series of choices based on necessities and priorities. Students need to go to school and employees have to go to work because those are their obligations. You must go to grocery stores because you need to eat. We make adjustments to ensure our health and safety. Some employers allow people to work from home. You shop after dinner when the stores are less crowded. You try to maintain a routine life. Why make church attendance optional? Our church is actually safer than a school, company or grocery store with fewer people. Coworkers follow the guidelines from the government, and we take necessary precautions. Ultimately, it is a matter of your commitment to the Lord and to this community. May the Lord give you wisdom to make choices that please Him.

CONCLUSION 結論

A church is a living body where Jesus Christ ministers His grace for our spiritual growth. God never intends for us to become free-lance believers. A church is a community where every member communicates with love to foster our commitment to the Lord and to each other. Every member is equally important. Jesus binds us together with Him as a complete entity.

INTRODUCTION 引言

教會在很多方面就像一個家庭。我們的教會很有名的一件事就是食物。我們有專業的廚房，由專業的廚師煮專業的菜。不久前，我們每年都會舉行宴會慶祝春節和感恩節，吸引了不少人。大多數教會在復活節和聖誕節的出席人數最多。但是我們卻在不同的季節有最高的出席率。一起吃飯有助建立關係。通常，人們不是趕緊吃完便走人，而是邊吃飯和邊聊天。當孩子還小的時候，我們家有一句話：「晚餐時間是家庭時間。」餐桌是家人分享生活中發生的事情的地方。教會是個屬靈的家。我們稱呼信徒為弟兄姐妹。我們一起學習、敬拜、事奉和成長。過去的二十個月以來，大流行徹底改變了我們的生活。它也影響到我們的教會生活。有些信徒一直都沒有踏進教會的大樓。作為牧師，我當然希望每個人都能回來聚會。但是如果有人還沒有準備好回來，我也完全尊重。我的責任是給你屬靈上的鼓勵，讓你為自己和家人作最好的決定。無論如何，現在是我們重新思考神對教會的心意的好時機。什麼是教會？我的定義是：教會是一個活的個體，耶穌基督在其中彰顯祂的恩典，幫助我們的靈命成長。

EXPLANATION 解釋

1. Community 群體

我們會在這篇信息中思考三個用詞。我們要考慮的第一個詞語是「群體」。教會是一個信徒的群體。許多人一聽到教會這個字就會想到建築物。第一華人浸信會是在 Cordova 的一幢大樓，我們每週都在這裡聚會。許多會友自我犧牲地奉獻金錢購買這塊地並蓋了這座建築物。一切榮耀都歸於神！我們也可以用餐桌來代表教會。每次見面時，我們就像一起吃飯。我們珍惜我們的關係，我們彼此分享神的美善。因此，教會不僅關乎個別的人，也關乎我們的全體。「教會」這個字的希臘文是 *ekklesia*，意思是「被呼召出來的群體」。聖經的傳道書這個名稱也是根據這個字，意思是傳道人。我們有不同的背景。神呼召我們，並賜下救恩。祂也把你帶到這裡，讓你成為這個群體的一部份。聖經將教會的成員描述為人體的不同部份。例如，保羅在以弗所書 4:4-6 中說：**4 身體只有一個，聖靈只有一個，正如你們蒙召同有一個指望。5 一主，一信，一洗，6 一神，就是眾人的父，超乎眾人之上，貫乎眾人之中，也住在眾人之內。**這段經文有七個「一」。這些元素是我們信仰的基礎。我們應該珍惜我們在基督裡的合一。我們與背景相近的人相處會感到比較舒服。坐在你周圍的人可能來自不同的背景或說不同的母語。但我們屬於同一個群體。他們是你的家人。我們必須打破我們只屬於某個語言小組的隔閡。我鼓勵你在大樓裡面跟任何人都打聲招呼。可以簡單地說聲「嗨」、揮揮手或用手肘碰一下。畢竟，是耶穌基督將我們連結在一起。祂打破了分隔我們的障礙。以弗所書 2:14-16 說：**14 因他使我們和睦，將兩下合而為一，拆毀了中間隔斷的牆；15 而且以自己的身體廢掉冤仇，就是那記在律法上的規條，為要將兩下藉著自己造成一個新人，如此便成就了和睦。16 既在十字架上滅了冤仇，便**

藉這十字架使兩下歸為一體，與神和好了。猶太人以自己是神的選民而感到自豪。從猶太人的角度來看，我們也是外邦人。耶穌為猶太人和外邦人付上了贖價，因為沒有人能達到神的標準。如此，耶穌使每個人都與祂和好。祂也使這兩群人和好了。然後祂把所有的信徒都放在一個新人和一個新的身體裡，就是教會。憑著信心接受耶穌，任何人都可以成為神家裡的一員。既然主已經聯合了，不要讓任何因素把我們分開。一旦我們進入到這個教會，我們便是這個群體的成員。不要讓我們的語言、社會地位、我們開的車或我們穿的衣服使我們分開。

2. Communication 溝通

我們屬於同一個群體。家庭成員之間的關係應該是繼續成長的。溝通是建立關係的基礎。溝通不只是說話而已，也包括彼此的交流。當人們想到教會時，通常會想到崇拜大堂。每個人都專注於講台，跟著台上的人敬拜神。但是為了加強我們的溝通，我們必須想像坐在一個圓圈裡。作為一個較小的教會給了我們一些優勢。你不能只是走進來，坐在角落裡，然後在聚會結束時稍稍離開而不與他人交流。隨著關係的發展，我們會更深入了解別人的興趣、學校、工作和家庭。也許我們可以分享生活中的掙扎或對未來的焦慮。然後你意識到其他人也有同樣的困難。接下來應該是互相關懷。加拉太書 6:2 鼓勵我們：**你們各人的重擔要互相擔當，如此，就完全了基督的律法。**耶穌說神的命令總結起來就是兩個原則：愛神和愛人。我們承擔別人的重擔是愛的表現。我們當然可以分享解決問題的途徑。但神也給了我們禱告的特權。我們可以向對方說：「我會為你禱告。」這是表達愛的具體方式。使徒約翰在約翰一書 4:7-8 說：**7 親愛的弟兄啊，我們應當彼此相愛，因為愛是從神來的。凡有愛心的，都是由神而生，並且認識神。8 沒有愛心的，就不認識神，因為神就是愛。**蘋果樹只能產蘋果。同樣，仁愛之神的兒女也應該表現出愛心。在我們說我們愛世界其他地方受苦的人之前，我們應該先愛我們教會的成員。愛必須伴隨著行動。耶穌愛我們到一個地步為我們死在十字架上。祂藉此樹立了犧牲之愛的榜樣。我們應該通過分享我們的時間和資源來愛弟兄姐妹。當我們有不同意見時，愛就變得尤其重要。避免衝突的最安全方法是躲在泡沫中。你一個人進來，而且不和任何人說話。但這不是神要我們過的教會生活。保羅在以弗所書 4:31-32 說：**31 一切苦毒、惱恨、忿怒、嚷鬧、毀謗，並一切的惡毒，都當從你們中間除掉；32 並要以恩慈相待，存憐憫的心，彼此饒恕，正如神在基督裡饒恕了你們一樣。**這裡的上下文是提到我們得救後要脫去舊人並穿上新人。懷恨在心是我們通常做的事情。要解決衝突，我們必須以恩慈相待，存憐憫的心，並彼此饒恕。我們需要神的恩典來幫助我們超越自己的本性。保羅提醒我們要想到基督。祂無條件地原諒我們。當祂還掛在十字架上時，祂甚至請求天父饒恕那些將祂釘在上面的人！別人得罪你的地方能比得上你對神的冒犯嗎？我們在這裡談到的是一個教會群體。你可能每週都會看到你不願意原諒的那個人。那真是痛苦啊！更好的處理辦法是向神祈求恩典和勇氣來化解衝突。不要讓任何事物攔阻我們在基督裡的交流。

3. Commitment 委身

溝通對於信仰群體中的關係建立是很重要的。群體的另一個關鍵要素是委身。對於現代人來說，委身並不容易。因此有些人一個月只去幾次健身房。大多數人的新年展望在二月底之前便擱置了。許多基督徒將教會視為像快餐店一樣的提供服務。需求得到滿足後，你便離開。然而，在神的眼中，教會應該像個家族企業。每個人都是團隊的一部分。你應該捲起袖子來參與。早期教會向我們展示出信仰群體中委身的榜樣。使徒行傳 2:44-46 說：44 信的人都在一處，凡物公用；45 並且賣了田產，家業，照各人所需用的分給各人。46 他們天天同心合意恆切的在殿裡，且在家中擘餅，存著歡喜、誠實的心用飯。信徒們聚在一起並分享一切。這需要高度的信任。他們每天都喜樂地聚會。教會生活是他們日常生活的一部份。當然，我們現代的社會和當時很不一樣。但是我們是否對我們的教會表現出類似的委身？聚會的出席率是一個很好的指標。大多數教會都受大流行影響。事實是，這個病毒可能會像流感一樣永遠存在。我不是要評判任何人，但我擔心那些寧願留在家裡的人。我們的直播和錄像能滿足他們的屬靈需求嗎？他們和其他弟兄姐妹有緊密的接觸嗎？他們與主的關係如何？希伯來書 10:24-25 說：24 又要彼此相顧，激發愛心，勉勵行善。25 你們不可停止聚會，好像那些停止慣了的人，倒要彼此勸勉，既知道那日子臨近，就更當如此。我希望沒有人成為「停止聚會」的人。據我所知，有些會友並沒有經常參加 Zoom 的小組聚會。如果他們不出席，他們如何與其他建立團契並共同成長？缺乏相互鼓勵時，人很容易傾向安逸甚至懶惰。鼓勵大家彼此委身。當你沒有看到某些人出席實體或線上聚會時，你可以向他們表達關心。生活是一系列基於需要和優先次序的選擇。學生需要上學，員工必須上班，因為這是他們的責任。你必須去超市，因為你需要吃飯。我們調整生活以確保自己的健康和 safety。一些雇主准許員工在家上班。你可以考慮在晚餐後去買菜，因為那時候人比較少。你盡量保持正常的生活。為什麼教會活動卻是可有可無的呢？我們的教會實際上比學校、公司或超市人更少更安全。同工們遵循政府的指引，我們採取必要的預防措施。歸根結底，核心問題是你對主和這個群體的委身。願主賜給你智慧，讓你做出討祂喜悅的決定。

CONCLUSION 結論

教會是一個活的個體，耶穌基督在其中彰顯祂的恩典，幫助我們的靈命成長。神從來不希望我們成為自由信徒。教會是一個群體，每個成員都以愛溝通，以加強我們對主和彼此的委身。每個成員都同等重要。耶穌將我們與祂聯繫在一起，成為一個完整的實體。