

## **Invocation (1 Chronicles 29:10ff)**

All thanks and praise to you, O God, for you are the Source of all things. All that we have, all that we offer back to you, has come from you. You search our hearts and know the depth of our gratitude, the relative openness with which we share our abundance. Direct our hearts to you and fill us with your Spirit. Make loving use of us in service to your cherished Creation. Live in us and make us your dwelling place. Amen.

## **Reading from the Christian Epistles**

**1 Corinthians 3:9-13, 16-17** **NRSV**

**From Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Church in Corinth**

For we are God's servants, working together;  
you are God's field, God's building.

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.**

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is...Christ. (9-11)

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver,  
precious stones, wood, hay, straw –  
the work of each builder will become visible,  
for the Day will disclose it,  
because it will be revealed with fire,  
and the fire will test what sort of work each has done... (12-13)

Do you not know that you are God's temple  
and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person.  
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (16-17)

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST in SIMI VALLEY**

**Dedication Celebration - September 18, 2004**

**Anne G. Cohen**

# 1 Corinthians 3:9-13, 16-17

## Choosing How to Build

The cornerstone is Christ.

The foundation is the work of master builders – not just Hal Whitemore and John Whitson – but all of the apostles and ancestors in faith who have gone before us. We are now building on that foundation and “Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.” (v.10)

What we are dedicating today is not only the physical achievement of this new meeting house – but the continuing efforts of every person here – alone and together – to EMBODY God’s dwelling place.

Throughout the years of bringing this vision to reality, I have been made aware of the intentions of those involved – the choices made regarding HOW to build on this particular piece of land.

Allow me to echo back those intentions - as I have heard them - and to bless those intentions - as I understand them - on this sacred day.

- Your intention is to build here a Place of Meeting – for people and God, for ideas and cultures, for rituals and mystery and meaning.
- Your intention is to build here a Sanctuary – a “City of Refuge” (Torah) where ANYONE in this community is welcomed, affirmed as they are, fed, supported prayed for, inquired after, invited back.
- Your intention is to build here a Community of Stories – ancient and yet unfolding stories, communal and personal stories – that bind you to God, to each other and to the World.
- Your intention is to build a Workshop for the Human Soul – with the tools of your Core Values and the power of your reliance on one another for the maintenance of accountability.
- Your intention is to build a Launching Pad - from where you can take your sense of “Mission” or “Advocacy” “to the street – to share your experience and understanding of God’s intention for the world with folks beyond these walls – in an attitude of possibility and persuasion – rather than in the arrogance of truth and conversion.
- Your intention is to build a Promotional Center - in the interest of fostering a Just Peace, Equitable Economic Structures, Accountable Political Systems,

and just plain Healthy Communication across all perceived boundaries – locally and globally.

- Your intention is to build a Transformational Organization - intent on Healing Human Divisions – a place of Deep Love, Inclusiveness and Authenticity – a location for True Dialogue where all are heard and each is open to being changed by the other (Thich Nhat Hanh, Living Buddha, Living Christ) – a forum where creeds are not demanded, beliefs are respected, religious symbols are fluid and responsive to these sharing this space at any given moment.
- Your intention is to build here a Place of Flourishing - flourishing gardens, flourishing people of all ages, cultures, races, sexual and gender orientations, faiths and economic means – flourishing Dreams moving unceasingly to Fruition.

You have seen the necessity for “something holy at the core of society.” (Kushner, *City of Refuge*, p.148)

And you have begun to build.

“Each builder must choose with care HOW to build.” (1 Cor.3:10)

May God bless your intentions and build with you the future whose gates you have entered.

One exhortation: Be mindful of the lure of this physical building to bind you to the protection of its easily narrowing walls. Do not become incarcerated by beauty or blinded in the defense of physical objects.

Remember to use this building more than you protect it.

Remember that which you are “taking to the street” – and that it involves inviting the street inside.

Remember the Holy – in the heart of each person, in the foundation of this place, at the core of society.

Remember the Fact of our Interbeing. (Thich Nhat Hanh, *Ibid.*)

The Hopi Tribe of Native American people “say that we all began together; that each race went on a journey to learn its own road to power, and changed; that now is the time for us to return, to put the pieces of the puzzle back together, to make the circle whole.”

(Starhawk, in Spiritual Literacy, Brussat p.93)

A teacher once tore to shreds a map of the world and, thinking it an impossible task, gave it to a recalcitrant student to put it together. Within ten minutes the girl was back, the task completed. Astounded the teacher asked her how she did it. The girl replied: “When I turned the pieces over, I found a torn-up man. I put him together, and when I looked at the other side, the world was whole again.”

(Soozi Hobeche, in Brussat, Ibid. p.354, adapted)

We are God’s Temple and God’s Spirit dwells in us.

God’s Temple is Holy and we are that Temple.

(1 Cor. 3:16-17)

**Let us build together with all of our intentions.**

And if you are moved to do so – as the Summy family shares their music with us - you may come forward to place your rock on the altar as a symbol of your desire to build with all others

**God’s Holy Dwelling Place.**