

A SEASON OF PRAYER AND PLANNING

REV. LITO VILLORIA

As August comes to a close, everyone anticipates the onset of the longest Christmas Season this coming week! When September kicks in, it will not be a surprise to hear Christmas carols played over radio stations, in the malls, and maybe in our neighborhood. No matter how the year has been going for us, Christmas carols somehow remind us of the hope and comfort we have in being with Christ.

The month of September is also a season of prayer and planning for our church leadership. The Pastoral Staff started the initial work of seeking God's guidance on the specific things He wants to do in 2024. They will initiate ministry meetings with their different teams this month to receive input and insights. Please pray that by the end of September, all ministry teams will have finalized the programs they will present to the Board of Elders for affirmation and approval.

For 2024, God has given us two main objectives for everything we need to do. First, to lead everyone to grow towards spiritual maturity in response to the Great Commandment. And second, to guide them on how to make disciples in fulfillment of the Great Commission. God also directed us to adopt at least two mind shifts. First, we need to focus on people, not on programs. In the past years, we started by thinking of good programs and then tried to plug people into them. This year, we begin by thinking about people and then design programs around them to fulfill our two main objectives.

The second mind shift, we need to look at everyone who considers GCF South Metro their home church as fellow servants and ministry

partners. We are all disciples of Christ who are called to do the work of the ministry. There should be no dichotomy between full-time church workers and volunteers. We want to shy away from using the term "volunteer" because somehow it connotes different expectations in doing the work of the ministry. We are all co-laborers in Christ who are expected to give our best as we serve together in the ministry.

In light of this second mind shift, I want to share with you my recent devotion in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, where it says, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit". This passage teaches us that every believer has been appointed by God to take part in the building up of the church. They have different roles, but all are equal in God's sight.

In the New Testament, spiritual gifts are discussed in Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, Romans 12, and 1 Corinthians 12. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul emphasized to the believers that there are diverse gifts, but all gifts come from the same source and have the same value. No one is greater than the other. And despite the diversity of gifts, the believers must strive to maintain unity in the body.

To maintain unity in our church family as we serve together, there are four essential biblical perspectives that we need to keep in mind. These will give us clarity on how we should view our fellow servants. And these perspectives should serve as the foundation of our service to the Lord.

First, the diversity of God's gifts. We must recognize the diversity of spiritual gifts among believers. There are varieties of gifts, but all gifts come from God. Every gift is needed to build up the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-5, 14-17, 19-20).

Second, dependence on God's power. We must be diligent in doing the work of the ministry. Everyone must and should give their best. There is no place and no excuse for mediocre service because God deserves our all and He gave us the power to do so (1 Corinthians 12:6).

Third, the deployment of God's gifts. We must use our spiritual gifts for the common good. We must serve one another. And we must do the work of the ministry to build up the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Lastly, the distribution of God's gifts. We must respect each other's gifts. Every gift has been apportioned by the Holy Spirit according to the will of God. Although there is a diversity of gifts, every spiritual gift has equal honor in God's eyes (1 Corinthians 12:11, 18, 21-26).

As we enter in a season of prayer and planning next month, I exhort everyone to remember our church leadership and ministry teams in prayer. Please pray for wisdom and strength for our different ministry teams. May we all receive wisdom so we can clearly discern the way God wants us to go. Pray that God would grant us strength so we will all have the courage to do what He wants us to do. May all our plans and actions lead to the building up of the church for the glory of God!✱