

# Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

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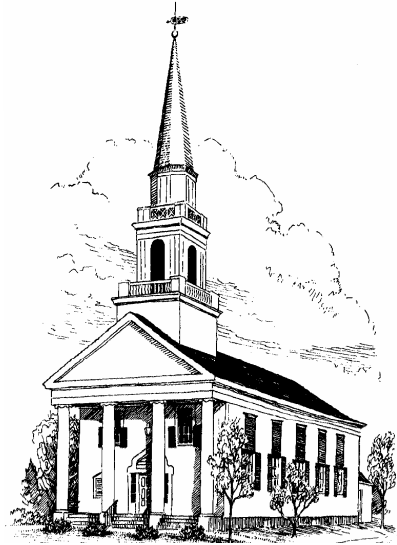
## “The Church of Good Reputation”

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Scriptures:

Psalm 25:4-10

Luke 24:13-35 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

I am thankful that I met your senior pastor six months ago as she was installed and that I was able to meet Mystic Church members and their pastor with the word of the Bible again. I vividly remember Pastor Ann and her family showing hospitality and her happiness in front of children. Despite being exhausted from my trip to Connecticut, seeing Pastor Ann being installed and the bright spirit of the congregation of Mystic Church made me forget about my exhaustion. I believe that the warm reception from the Mystic Church members is the fruit of 15 years of relationship. Despite our geographical distance, our cultural differences, and our difficulties in communication, I believe the love in our relationship remains and it will overcome any obstacles. The Body is one and the Spirit of the Lord is one. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. Therefore, I believe there is only one church too. We encourage each other, we learn together, and I believe our relationship is strengthened if we are spiritually one.

We hear a lot of rumors in our lives. In Korea, we call someone who is quick to listen to rumors, "sosiktong", meaning "well-informed circles". There are good and bad rumors. Good rumors make us happy, but bad rumors make us sad. A Korean proverb states, "bad news travels fast." Rumors are delivered far and fast. Therefore, bad rumors are delivered faster than good rumors.

Someone ran into a teacher and he wanted to talk about a rumor he heard. The teacher told him, "Hold on," and asked three questions. "Is your story true?" "I'm not sure!" "Does your story make any sense?" "No, it does not." "Is it funny at least?" "No." Then the teacher asked, "Then why should we listen to the story?"

Bad rumors that bring difficulty spread fast but we don't know how beneficial good rumors can be. Refer to verse 8 about Paul hearing rumors about the Thessalonian church. That rumor is good. When Paul heard rumors that commended the Thessalonian church, he told them that the rumor about their faith toward God had reached far places. The "gossip" of faith had spread quickly and widely because the Thessalonica Church and Christians had a good and healthy life. I heard that Mystic Church is one of the most healthy and beautiful churches in the Connecticut Conference.

The churches between the GyeongGi Presbytery and the Connecticut Conference have had relationships but recently some of these churches severed their relationships and went on their own. While our own two churches have had problems, we are now known to have the best relationship. I hope that our churches' relationship is a model for all the others by having a relationship that is more than a rumor. I really hope that together, Mystic Church and Dong-Bu Sunlin Church become a healthy church that is well-known to everyone.

What does a church need to be healthy to be well-known to everyone? I believe that we need to follow the three characteristics of the Thessalonian church which had a good reputation. So what are the three characteristics of the Thessalonian church?

#1. In verse 3 Paul writes “We are constantly remembering ...your work of faith...” Your work of faith. "Work produced by faith," means an act of faith, trustworthy activities, and the power of faith. In other words, the power of faith inspired the work of faith. Faith is not a noun but a verb. In other words, faith doesn't stand on its own; it needs to produce fruit.

The Thessalonian church remained faithful, a living faith that urges one to come back to God and throw away one's idols. Faith is coming back to God and breaking up all the idols of the past. Most Thessalonians were immersed in deep polytheism, worshipping Hellenistic idols. Thessalonian Christians had been idol-worshippers before accepting the Christian Gospel from Paul. They had been the slaves of Satan and served all kinds of idols. But when we embrace the Christian Gospel so that we produce work of faith, idols have no place to stand any more. As with light and darkness: they can't be together in the same place. People who accept the Gospel of Christ must surely throw away their idols. The faith of the Thessalonians became a model for all believers because of their acceptance of the Gospel after throwing away all of their idols and coming back to God. The Thessalonians showed faith in their lives.

One must engage in work of faith. What is your idol today? If you consider substance, honor, children, hobbies, and work more important to you than God, then these are your idols. We must defeat all idols and accept the true fruit of life. The gathering of the saints is a healthy church that can't help but spread its good reputation. The reputation of our church is not the responsibility of anyone but ourselves.

#2. Second, the Thessalonian church engaged in labor of love. The same verse 3, Paul writes, “[we are] constantly remembering ...your work of faith and labor of love...” In other words, work prompted by love. True love is made of service you perform. A husband who loves his wife gives his all for his wife. A wife who loves her husband gives her all for her husband. Also, parents who love their children give their all for their children. Work prompted by love, this was the difference between other churches and the Thessalonian church. They had shown love, not only by speaking of it with their mouths and with their language, but through self-sacrificing work. The apostle John said, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." (*1 John 3:18*)

Thomas à Kempis wrote in “The Imitation of Christ” that "love without pain is lifeless.” In other words, “Love follows pain.” How did Livingstone, despite the possibility of death, go to Africa to share the evidence of the Gospel and live a different life? Why did professor Dr. Albert Schweitzer quit his job, go to a country of cannibals, build a hospital, take care of patients and serve? Why did Damian serve lepers until he himself became infected and died? Because of the strong love of Christ and for Christ.

Christians in Thessalonica stood on the rock of faith to show love only to God. A person who abandons idols and comes back to God decides to only love God and to serve God from then on. Since their ancestors worshiped idols, worshipping idols had become a habit from childhood so when the Thessalonian Christians accepted the Gospel, it was not easy for them to stop worshipping the idols from childhood.

But the Thessalonian Christians threw away their idols and believed in God alone. The idol was nothing; it could never help humans. Instead, they believed in the Almighty God, the true living God, who helps and holds onto the saints. They tried to convey this love through their labor, their service.

Let us try to love the true living God, who became flesh because he loves us. Let our love overflow from this church. Let us love the neighborhood with overflowing love. This is the second secret to having a good reputation.

#3. The Thessalonian church had “steadfastness of hope”, endurance inspired by hope. Paul continues in verse 3 “[we are] constantly remembering...your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Endurance inspired by hope. At that time, the Thessalonian Church was often persecuted because they did not worship the Roman emperor. But they endured because of their hope of the second coming of Christ. The second coming of the Lord is a repeated promise from God that is more obvious than the fact that the sun rises every morning. Therefore, true Christians should desire the second coming of the Lord.

The saints of the Thessalonian church could endure with great hope in the second coming of Christ; a hope that required endurance because of its being in the future. A farmer’s hope for harvest requires endurance during the year and a student’s hope for academic success requires endurance for ten years. Hope of professional distinction requires endurance of a lifetime. Therefore, the greater the hope, the greater the endurance. The highest hope for saints is the second coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they need the highest endurance.

Everyone has hope. Anyone can endure any difficulties if they have hope. Our hope is not of this world but is cherished in heaven. Our hope is not visible but is invisible; our hope is not perishable but is imperishable. (*1 Peter 1:3-4*). Therefore, people who put on the patience of Christ can endure suffering because they know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. (*Romans 5:3-4*). The Thessalonian church was beautiful and had a good reputation. They could not help but spread their reputation because they produced work by faith, labored prompted by love, and had endurance inspired by hope.

Our Korean church inherited a precious tradition of faith. It was started by the blood of a missionary, Robert Jermain Thomas, who had tried to come to Korea in 1866 on the schooner *The General Sherman* in order to bring the Gospel, but he was martyred. Usually, in the case of non-believing countries and tribes, missionaries go there first and then a church is established, and finally the Bible is translated. Those are the general steps and procedures. Korea had quite a different order, however, and she experienced the reverse course. In Korea, first the Bible was translated, then the church was set up, and then the missionaries visited. Before the gospel came into this country, some young people, who had received it in China, translated the Chinese Bible into Korean with missionary John Ross in 1882. Then Sang-ryoon Seo, who had participated in the translation was spotted at the border when he crossed, so he barely penetrated into Korea, but preached and established the church there in 1884. US Presbyterian missionary H.G. Underwood and Methodist H.G. Appenzeller arrived in Incheon Harbor at Easter in 1885 and from then missionary work has been deployed on a full scale. How wonderful is this example!

Today’s Korean church, which succeeded such passion, is burning especially with the passion of the gospel. Enthusiastic church people are serving the Sunrise Praying Service together at 5:00 a.m. and supporting the spirituality of the Korean Church. The Special Daybreak Prayer Service is indeed a festival held at dawn. Based on this kind of passion, the fervent participation of the Korean church in missionary work has resulted in Korea becoming the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest country in the world for the number of missionaries it sends out, second only to the USA. Such passion is also burning in the mind and spirit of our Dong-bu Sunlin church.

What kind of reputation of *our* church should be spread? In the outer figure of our church, there are many things of which are very proud. The building of Dong-bu Sunlin church is very beautiful though not as much as Mystic Congregational church. Sunlin Walking-Park is a beautiful place in which

we are able to have rest, stroll, and exercise, breathing fresh air. Sunlin Garden is small but a well balanced area in which we are able to see the pretty flowers and share some talk. Sunlin Athletics Park will be a space for the children's playground and youth athletics for roller blading, basketball, Korean football, and badminton when completed in 2010. The Sunlin mini-golf practice net at the backyard right after church is a good space for fellowship among the church believers, especially the middle-aged.

Brother's House is being beautifully constructed as per the plan. After completion, it will be utilized for the multi-purpose space for the children's chapel, youth chapel, English library to be made in the partnership and cooperation with Mystic church, and Silver Room for the place of rest and acquaintance for the aged persons. Of course they are not perfect facilities, but hardware-wise, it is being equipped with a flawless appearance as a pastoral church in the city. It is a source of pride to be able to spread a rumor to our heart's content to have such beautiful rooms.

I would like to confess that the most important thing to inform you of, however, is the passion we had from the beginning of the Korean church and spreading the message everywhere. We are proud of this passion as it might be much more than Mystic church. Hallelujah ... I and our believers are making the effort to make a robust church which has work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope.

If the outer figure of church is hardware, believers' passion can be its software. In order to be well equipped with the software, we are settling down a program "Two Wings Soaring System" which is a kind of education course for believers. It is a program to train believers through the activation of both wings of large group Worship and small group Open Cell. This course is composed of Open Meeting, New Family Class, Nurture Class, Disciple Class, Soldier Class, and Reproduction Class. The believers whose sense of values are changed through the training courses will become healthy Christians who live by the Vision God gives.

I feel confident that our church will be well-equipped with hardware and software by those things above and the ones which produced the good reputation of the Thessalonian church. Already small fruits are appearing in our church. Our believers' faces are getting lighter. New families of more than 30 persons enrolled this year and they are gladly leading religious life. "Going well !" has become our church greeting.

I wish our church to be a model for many churches in which our [sisters and] brothers encourage each other, robustly grow up, and become a pleasure to our Lord God. Let's encourage each other and grow our partnership so that it can be a good example to other churches. May God's blessing and love be with you and every one in your church.