

Yesterday morning when my mother and I were talking, we heard a death knell from our church in Madurai. Though this word death knell has become figurative, in our part of the town, it still means someone is dead when the church bells ring slowly on a weekday in the morning. I immediately called up the Pastor's wife and learnt that a very senior leader of our congregation has got his Home Call.

This morning we had the funeral. Eulogies were said about him. I am really fascinated by the extreme sense of purpose of these men from the older generation. At times I wonder whether such people will become historical relics. This person Mr. Surya Gandhi, was one of the pivotal persons in the building of this church. This Church St. Andrews Church was built some 40 years ago, by the pioneering efforts of a handful of lay people. One among them was my grand father, my father's father. We live at the backyard of this huge church, in the house which my grandfather built and bequeathed it to my father.

Some 40 years ago this motley group of people my grandfather, Mr. Chelliah, a retired deputy collector, this person a commercial tax officer, Mr. Karunakaran a DSP, Benjamin uncle a university professor and a few others decided to build a church in this NGO colony, Nagamalai, Madurai. In those days even residential houses were far and

few. Yet these handful of Christians determined to build a Church, to worship the Lord.

Benjamin uncle who eulogized about this deceased person, told us, how once he and my grandfather went to see him in Dindigul regarding the Church building project. The land was bought and the church was being built and there was not enough money. After discussing church affairs both my grandfather and Benjamin uncle left for Madurai. Mr. Suryagandhi accompanied them to the bus stand and Benjamin uncle remembered that as he was walking with them through the streets of Dindigul, he humbly sought financial help from the people there for the building of the church, inspite of being a high ranking government officer.

My grandfather came to Kumbakonam , where we were living then, to solicit funds. When he came to Kumbakonam church one person said he might contribute. So to collect that money he walked everyday for four days and on the fourth walk he was given 10 rupees! With such unflagging zeal they put all they had and built the house of God. They were not rich and they did not have any other means of fund raising. They had big families. In those days no children lived abroad and so no dollars poured in. They walked and walked, travelled all over, collecting coins of all sizes, small money and built the house of God.

One thing my heart is so moved by this church is not the church building but the vision of these people who wanted to build a house for the Lord. Last week pastor in his sermon referred to the church as mother's house. It is so true. The doors of the church are open most of the time. I have seen lot of non Christians come there weep and go back. Many have come to the Lord. The sexton's(caretaker of the church) wife has a big burden and every evening she sits in the courtyard of the church and prays for all who needs prayer. The pastor's house is inside the church compound and he is very prayerful and never feels disturbed whoever and whenever someone comes to pray. Even to this day, it is a real blessing that we have very old people still praying for all the church members. When mummy had gone to Canada there was not a single Sunday I ate at home. I was always called to some house and fed. The church is not a building but there is so much of sharing , loving and reaching out.

As I sat in the memorial service and saw the high ceiling of the church which has truly been a mother's home to so many a wayward soul, I cannot help but remember the sacrifice, hard work of those visionary few, which have gone into the making of it. This uncle who passed away walked every morning to the church to pray before starting the day, as long as he could walk. One of his sons is in full time ministry. God is using

him powerfully. The generation of the godly has never been lost.

I was also thinking whether, we of this generation could ever dream of something big and work towards accomplishing it. This singleness of purpose and this indefatigable zeal and enthusiasm of those earlier generations seem to be a mirage now. Though they had big families they never rested till they built and consecrated the church. Soon after that my grandfather went back to his home town Tirunelveli. His work here accomplished and very soon he went to the Lord.

Whenever I sit in this church and pan the breadth, width and height of the church I used to wonder, "Would that have been possible in this generation!" I really really think, it is such a blessing, if God has chosen anyone to build His Temple. The blessing overflows to generations.... !

Let us build the house of the Lord. Let us build up people in the Lord.

Do you not know that you are the temple of *God* and *that* the Spirit of *God* dwells in you? I Corinthians 3, 16.