



a Note from Stephen

Beloved,

When I think about words or phrases that describe this past year, things like “strategic initiatives,” “effective developments,” and “new disciples” are just some of the phrases that come to mind. 2023 was truly an exciting year as we watched the Lord bring significant growth in attendance, financial stability, new partnerships with local and global ministries, and key initiatives that made our ministry more effective here at home — and beyond.

As we face a new fiscal year, I’m always excited to see what God has in His mind for The Shepherd’s Church. Frankly, I am more excited about *tomorrow* than yesterday. But one thing *must* remain constant — our total dependence on Christ who has promised to build *His* church.

I remember reading several years ago about a study conducted by an agricultural school in Iowa. It reported that production of one hundred bushels of corn from one acre of land required the following: 400,000 lbs. of water; 6,800 lbs. of oxygen; 5,200 lbs. of carbon; 160 lbs. of nitrogen, 125 lbs. of potassium, 75 lbs. of yellow sulfur and, additional elements too numerous to mention.

In addition to these elements, the corn field needed to receive the right *amounts* of rain and sunshine — at the right *time* — in order to raise a bumper crop.

Although many hours of the farmer's labor were needed — after all, he ploughed the field and planted the seed and then irrigated the corn — it was estimated that only 5% of the *produce* could be attributed to his labor. Don’t misunderstand, he needed to do *his* part. But the miracle of life — the principle of power that took his efforts, then germinated solitary seeds, caused them to defy gravity and grow toward the sun, bearing fruit after its created design — this was all well *beyond* the ability of the farmer.

I couldn’t help but think of Paul’s comments to the Corinthian church when he wrote, “*I planted, and Apollos watered, but God gave the growth*” (1 Corinthians 3:6).

I remain convinced that *this* year will be the most fruitful ever. Join me in recognizing that The Shepherd’s Church cannot flourish for one day of operation — no matter our money or manpower — without God’s principle of life at work in our midst. So, let’s trust Him together as we offer our best efforts to Him, and then joyfully watch as He brings in another bumper crop for *His* church . . . and for *His* glory.

Ready to plant new seed,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephen".