

"And God said, I will dwell in them . . . and they shall be My people;
. . . and ye shall be My sons and daughters. – II Corinthians 6:16, 18

April 2019

Dear Saugatuck UMC Church Family,

Over the years I have become more and more convinced that it is God's intention that our families be like the church when the church is at its best. And equally, it is God's intention that our church be like our families when the family is at its best. That insight gives meaningful guidance for both church and family.

Mary and I have had the opportunity to serve 8 United Methodist Churches. And if you include our home churches, college and seminary churches the total the number of church families we have shared in is 12. I suspect at least some of you have also had a similar experience.

A simple obvious observation is that all churches are not the same, (Not even United Methodist Churches) and not all church families are the same.

A second observation is that the size of the church we attend does not necessarily affect our sense of being part of the church family. I think it is a myth that all large churches are less friendly and somehow less accepting and less caring. Equally untrue is the idea that smaller churches are always warmer, friendlier and more inviting. Being a church family is sometimes described as a "sense of community, a sense of belonging or a sense of being accepted." Those are subjective experiences and not everyone experiences "church family" in the same way.

This leads to a third observation. Two people can attend the same church worship service and have a completely difference experience. It is wrong to believe that everyone who attends our church has the same experience we have. Several years ago I was pastor of a medium size church. Most in our church family including me believed we were a warm, caring, inviting congregation. I remember a couple who visited. They received a standard letter from me thanking them for their visit and our hope that they felt welcome. Like Saugatuck UMC most people always commented on how friendly our church was. But this couple responded to my letter and politely shared that this was not their experience. I remember sharing the letter with humility in a sermon. I said that being "church family" can never be assumed but must be worked at just like being a family in our homes required being intentional.

The Gaither's have a song that express it so well, "The Family of God."

I'm so glad I'm a part of the Family of God,
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family
You will notice we say "brother and sister" 'round here,
It's because we're a family and these are so near;
When one has a heartache, we all share the tears,
And rejoice in each victory in this family so dear.
From the door of an orphanage to the house of the King,
No longer an outcast, a new song I sing;
From rags unto riches, from the weak to the strong,
I'm not worthy to be here, but praise God I belong!

Let's make sure everyone who attends Saugatuck UMC can feel they belong.

In Christ, Emmett & Mary