

## **Reflections on Core Value: *Sustaining Community***

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When I think about our core value: *"We are a compassionate, connected community that acknowledges and respects our differences"*, there really seems to be 3 distinct areas of focus - compassion, community, and diversity.

Let's dive into what each of those means to me.

### **We are compassionate**

Compassion is showing concern for the suffering and misfortune of others. Its Latin root "compati" means "to suffer together." When I think about how we are compassionate, how we show concern for the suffering of others, I immediately think about our ministries. I think about our ministries which feed the hungry, our ministries which clothe the naked, and our ministries which give friendship to the lonely. I think about our mission trips which travel to disaster areas to heal those whose lives have been reduced to shambles. I think about the small acts each member of the congregation does to acknowledge one another as a person.

To me it is not all about being compassionate, but also about being open to receive compassion. Megan and I struggle to accept help at times - we say to ourselves "we are smart and hard working, with enough energy we can work through this ourselves". I can promise you this is a foolish mind to have. When we first brought home our daughter Eleanor, born underweight and with complications in the midst of global pandemic, we were proud and tried to just handle it ourselves. But this drove us to a point almost beyond hope, we were suffering from fear and anxiety - "what if she never gets better?"

But in that suffering our Church and small group lifted us up. Cathy Davis made certain we were fed with her delicious cooking. Our small group gave us moments of joy and friendship every Sunday. They listened to our worries and shared in our suffering. They lifted us out of our darkness and into a place of hope. If we had not opened ourselves up to receive these compassionate acts, I don't see how we could have made it through intact. I would encourage you to not only act compassionately, but also be willing to receive compassion.

## **We are a connected community**

Connection and a sense of community is critical to our success as a Church. Without connection what are we more than a building full of people who all happen to show up on Sunday.

When Megan and I first moved to Columbus from North Carolina, we were looking to find something different than the transient relationships we came from in the high turnover, tech focused community of Research Triangle Park. We wanted to put roots down in Columbus and integrate ourselves into the community. We wanted to feel like we were participating in something bigger than ourselves that would have lasting positive effects on our neighbors.

We found exactly this at Maple Grove. In the first few weeks we visited the Church, I cannot count the number of people who reached out to us to make a connection. We were asked to join the drama group, the technical team, the millennial group, to form a small group - the list goes on. In each of these instances, even if we did not decide to accept the kind offer, someone saw us and saw a chance to reach out and make a connection, to make us part of the Maple Grove community. This is what makes Maple Grove such an amazing place.

When the pandemic struck, our ability to maintain connection and community was at risk of disappearing due to lock downs and social distancing guidelines. Our leaders saw this and knowing how important connection and community are to us, took immediate action. Online worship became a priority and was turned around in record time. Small group meetings went virtual. Socially distanced events were scheduled to keep us engaged. All of these things helped to preserve our sense of community and our Church continues to ensure we maintain this sense of community.

## **We acknowledge and respect differences**

Finally, we acknowledge and respect our differences. It is our differences and diversity which makes us strong as a Church. With a single mind, we could never push ourselves to grow and see where God is leading us. We need people with different viewpoints, experiences, and ideas! (To me, a completely homogeneous congregation sounds so boring).

Part of having differences is disagreeing and having space to disagree. Even within my own small group we have such a wide variety of viewpoints on a number of topics. From pacifism, gun ownership, or the compatibility of the military in Christianity - we certainly do not all agree, but it is in these differences and the discussions around them, we are able to understand one another and form lasting relationships.

I truly believe that God speaks through our differences. To those who may fear “the other” or someone who brings different ideas, I challenge you with this: Who among us can claim that another is not welcome in God’s house? Who can say you are too different? I would encourage you to embrace those differences and see what you can learn about one another.