

Edify

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Why is the Local Church Essential?

When our kids were moving away from home, we – like most parents – had plenty of advice that we wanted to give to them. Top on the list was encouraging them to find a good church and to genuinely plug themselves into the life of that community. Thankfully, both of our daughters not only plugged themselves into local churches in Toronto and Tegucigalpa, but they also subsequently joined new church plants that came out of those congregations. They did it not because we told them to do it. They did it because they knew that the church was crucial to themselves and to the mission of Christ. They believed in God's plan for the church. They could not conceive of living out their faith apart from living in community with God's people. They could not imagine being connected to the church and not living out Christ's mission in the world.

It is clearly one of the preeminent priorities of Christ Jesus to build His church as an extension of Himself and as the new temple where God by His Spirit resides. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says to Peter, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Peter had just made the confession "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

That confession was foundational to Jesus' mission to build His church. *There is no accurate understanding or profession of Jesus as the Christ without a recognition that He came to earth to buy the church with His blood and to build the church*

for His glory. Ephesians 5:25 reads "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her."

Jesus had no concept of American individualistic Christianity. While every person's faith must be personal, no one lives out faith in isolation. The Christ must have a community of "little christs" (that's the meaning of Christian) who would be His body, His flock, His bride, and His temple. His identity as the Messiah was inseparably bound to His covenantal commitment to us. He came to buy the church and to build His church.

When we take the name Christian, we also take the mission that goes with the name: to build His church to the ends of the earth. The church is as inextricably tied to our identity in Christ as it was to Jesus' identity as the Messiah. We shouldn't think ourselves as any less connected to the church than connected to Christ. Union with Him brings us

into union with His people and their mission. That is why Jesus' said these words to all of us: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Baptism into Christ is being baptized into His church. If we are one with Him by faith, we are united with each other through faith. We are His. He is ours (plural). We belong to one another. What a privilege and responsibility! ♦ - Senior Pastor Kevin Dibbley

*"Christ loved
the church and
gave Himself up
for her."*

-Ephesians 5:25

MINISTRY SPOTLIGHT: Congregational Care

By Karen Kowalke, Treasurer

If the church is the presence of Christ on earth, what is that supposed to look like when it comes to caring for one another? And specifically, how is that lived out at Waterbrooke?

Galatians 6:2 tells us to “bear one another’s burdens,” which involves offering empathy, emotional support during difficult times, and practical assistance. Waterbrooke’s visitation group, led by Joyce and Paul Casey, provides that and more to a group of seven people in the Waterbrooke body whose ability to get out on their own is limited. During monthly visits, the team demonstrates caring through conversation and prayer, and it identifies needs such as cleaning or grocery shopping. Joyce says she sees this as “one way to be the hands and feet of Jesus.”

First Thessalonians 5:11 exhorts us to “encourage one another and build one another up,” epitomized by Waterbrooke’s small group ministry. Through regular meetings, the group members strengthen one another’s faith, uplift spirits and provide affirmation along with accountability.

One small group leader, Steve Kowalke, admits that, “On the evening of our small group, sometimes I’m tired and just wish it would be canceled. But afterwards – every time – I’m always so glad we met, because we encouraged and challenged one another all while having a great time!”

Another Scripture addresses the need for tangible acts of kindness and service.

First John 3:18 asks us to “love not in word or talk but in deed and truth.” Waterbrooke abounds with people stepping up to care for one another. For instance, when Gail Berger moved to an assisted living home and stopped driving, men from the Saturday morning Bible Study formed a rotation to give her rides to church. Another example of this care is after Ryan Boyum’s accident, his small

group faithfully visited him in the hospital, went to his home to pick up things he needed, and assisted him with some of the medical paperwork involved. Kristin Keppel, for many years, has coordinated meal delivery

whenever someone has a baby or is recovering from an illness. And other members send flowers for hospitalizations and funerals, write monthly notes of encouragement to college students, or coordinate care packages for those deployed overseas.



Paul and Joyce Casey lead the visitation group at Waterbrooke.

Our hospitality ministry, faithfully led by Dianna and Ken Duncan since the founding of Waterbrooke, exists primarily to facilitate conversation and caring after the church service.

The examples shared so far include some of the formal care ministries at Waterbrooke. There are countless informal situations in which we show our care for one another. When we converse with others after church over a donut, meet at a coffee shop, or gather for a meal, we share our lives and burdens with each other, and these Scriptures are brought to life. There simply isn’t enough room in this article to list all the ways that people at Waterbrooke have sacrificed time, energy, funds and belongings to help out a fellow believer in need, usually behind the scenes.

As we emulate Christ’s love, compassion and selflessness, we not only represent Christ to each other, we represent Christ to the world. Jesus says “As I have loved you so must you love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13: 34-35). In other words, what may seem like small acts of kindness are part of God’s much

larger purpose in advancing His mission in the world. We all want to participate in that! ♦

Karen Kowalke and her family started attending Waterbrooke in 2000, and for the past 15 years, she’s handled finance and human resources for the church. She enjoys hiking at their Black Hills cabin, reading, and improving her rusty French.



Dan Citarella and others from the men’s Bible study give Gail Berger rides to church.

Praying Together as a Church is Paramount

By Pastor Gabe Zepeda

Without oxygen, humans die. Similarly, if Christians do not pray together, the church grows weak and loses a kingdom “pulse.” Prayer is the spiritual oxygen we need to pump life into the heart of the church. When we cease to pray as a church, we cease to be a church and disengage from Christ’s mission. Too often, prayer is an add-on in our lives and ministry rather than the power that ignites kingdom work in everything we do.

Paul Miller writes, “Prayer is not a ministry of the church—it is the heart of ministry through which the real, functional leadership of the intimate union of the Spirit and Jesus, formed at the resurrection, operates.”

What happens when we pray as a church? When we pray together, three things will occur:

1. The Spirit Empowers Us

In Acts 2, God’s Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, and the church was born. The disciples spoke in tongues of fire, uttering languages understood by the multiethnic peoples in the region. Peter preached Christ crucified and risen, calling everyone to repent and receive forgiveness of sin in Jesus’s name. As a result, the Lord saved 3,000 souls! Pentecost is extraordinary. But what led up to this event? Something ordinary: the disciples prayed together in the Upper Room (Acts 1:13–14). When we bend our knees in prayer together, the Spirit empowers us. When we come to God with empty hands, He fills us with His Spirit. The Upper Room precedes Pentecost.

Do you want to experience God’s power? Then pray. Do you want to see revival? Then pray. But what happens when we do not pray together? We quench the Spirit. The link between prayerlessness and quenching the Spirit is unbreakable (1 Thessalonians 5:17–19). A prayerless church quenches the Spirit. But a praying church is empowered by the Spirit.

2. Our Faith is Strengthened

Prayer in the Upper Room propelled Pentecost. And the Spirit poured out at Pentecost drives us to keep going to the Upper Room to pray. That is what the early disciples did: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). These four practices strengthened their faith in the following ways: they feared God, were unified, were generous, were hospitable, and had favor with all the

people (Acts 2:43–47). However, a prayerless church can breed the opposite: pride, division, greed, an unwelcoming spirit, and little to no lasting witness within the community. Prayerlessness weakens the church. But, when we pray together, our faith is strengthened to glorify God.

3. Christ’s Mission Continues

In Acts 6:1–6, although the early church grew, a problem arose. The Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in the daily food distribution. The apostles who supervised this initiative could no longer keep up with the demands of a growing church. So, with the help of the church, they selected and installed qualified men who served as the first deacons. What did this accomplish? First, by deploying others to serve, the apostles took care of an immediate need. Second, by deploying others to serve, the apostles kept their priority. What was their priority? The apostles said, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

There are so many good ministries, but none of them is as paramount as prayer and the ministry of the word. And yet, churches and leaders can prioritize

good ministries above these two. What happens when we keep our priorities straight? Christ’s mission continues. Acts 6:7 says, “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the

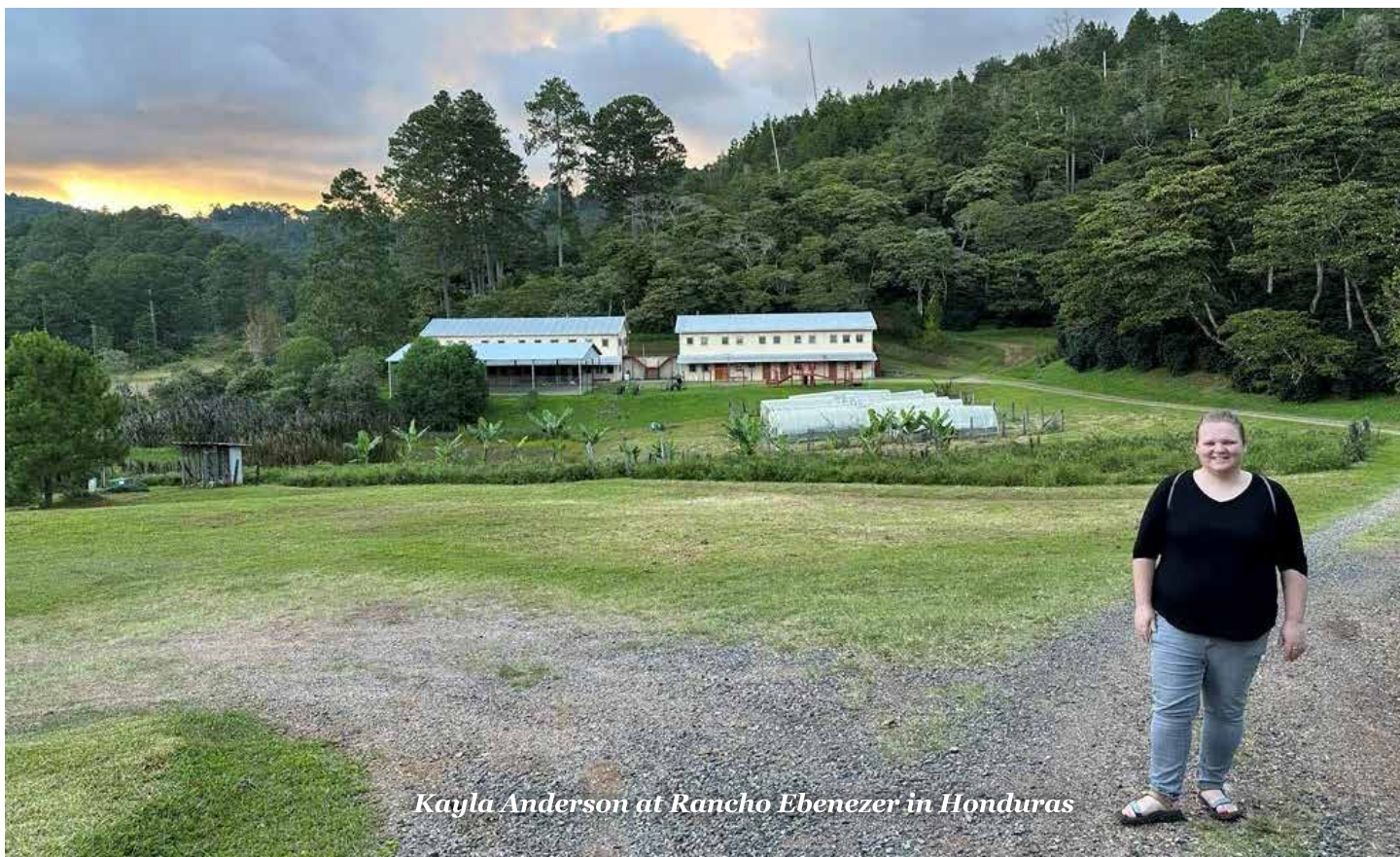
disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

Do you want the gospel to spread like crazy? Pray together.

You can tell much about a church and its leaders by what they prioritize. As leaders we need to ask, are we devoted to prayer and the ministry of the word? As a church we must ask, is prayer an accessory to our life or the oxygen we breathe in everything we do for the kingdom? This year, will we devote ourselves to praying together as a church? In our small groups? On Wednesday nights? On Sunday mornings? In all of our ministries? In our discipleship? In our families? Imagine what God will do in and through us if we pray together! ♦

Gabe Zepeda is the Pastor for Worship and Gospel Formation. He and his wife Rebekah have five children: Gabriella, Micah, Aletheia, Zion, and their newest little one, Theodore, who arrived Dec. 11, 2024.

Prayer is the power that ignites kingdom work in everything we do.



Kayla Anderson at Rancho Ebenezer in Honduras

Church's Enthusiasm Encourages Missionary

By Diana Barto

Uncertain. Hesitant. Discouraged. That's how Kayla Anderson felt about returning to Honduras for another short-term mission trip. She'd served at Rancho Ebenezer in the mountains just outside of Tegucigalpa for two weeks in May 2023. And although she was fully funded and eager to reconnect with friends there, she struggled to feel excited about the trip because she was wrestling with God's purpose for her.

Since the 2023 trip, which was through World Gospel Outreach, Kayla had learned that serving as a long-term missionary there was not an option for her. That was painful because it had seemed like an obvious match. Kayla is a devoted follower of Jesus with special education credentials, Spanish language skills, and a heart for sharing the gospel with Latino kids. And Rancho Ebenezer is a family-based community for at-risk Honduran children. It includes family-style homes and a bi-lingual Christian academy offering trauma-informed care for dozens of children in Kindergarten through 6th grade.

"It's a pretty special place," Kayla says. "As a

teacher, I've been so impressed by how they run things."

But serving full-time at Rancho Ebenezer was not God's plan for Kayla. And adding to this disappointment and uncertainty was the isolation she felt going as the only person from Waterbrooke.

Even so, God was working. Before Kayla flew off to Honduras in November, her small group and several individuals from the Waterbrooke family showed their excitement about her trip, prayed boldly for her, and supported her. As they did this, the discouragement melted away.

"It was the look of joy and excitement on their faces that encouraged me," Kayla says. "It was contagious enthusiasm! They fanned the flame for me to go."

Covered by the prayers of her church family, Kayla now had the peace, hope, and confidence she'd been lacking. As she and her life-long family friend Christy headed to Honduras, Kayla grew excited to see how God would work and reveal Himself to her, the kids, and other workers.

For a week Kayla and Christy served the kids at Rancho Ebenezer through English tutoring sessions, art lessons, and physical education activities. The

two also spent time in the teacher house fellowshiping with educators and other workers in the community. The culture of hospitality at Rancho Ebenezer is wonderful, Kayla says.

“They brought us Honduran coffee and tea, we just got to sit and talk, building friendships and sharing the hard things and the good things of day-to-day life with the kids,” she says.

During the last half of the trip, God showed Kayla His plan for her to make regular short-term mission trips to Honduras. Part of that revelation was through the example of her friend Christy, who was traveling and serving alongside her in Honduras. Christy has been a short-term missionary making regular trips to serve in Guatemala for 35 years.

This confirmation and clarity about God’s plan for Kayla was life-giving and showed how loving His character is, she says.

“My heart was encouraged by His kindness... He’s not wasting how He made me,” she says, recalling how faithful, wise, and caring God has been in leading her, even when she felt uncertain.

Kayla is looking forward to returning to Honduras again soon and, Lord willing, bringing some of the Waterbrooke family with her to serve the kids at Rancho Ebenezer, which hosts several groups of short-term missionaries every summer.



Waterbrooke’s Kayla Andersen (center) served alongside her friend Christy (left) and local teacher Dalia (right) at Ebenezer Academy in Honduras.

For more information about short-term mission teams, child sponsorship opportunities, and Honduran coffee available at Rancho Ebenezer, check out www.wgoreach.org/rancho-ebenezer. ♦

Diana Barto is married to Michael and serves Waterbrooke as editor of *Edify*. When she isn’t baking or visiting their two daughters at college, Diana enjoys tea parties, flower photography and theater outings.



While in Honduras, Kayla Anderson (left) spent time with Steve and Kris Nelson and their children (center). They are long-term missionaries who live at Rancho Ebenezer and help host short-term missions teams during the summer months. Christy Rice (right) is one of Kayla’s life-long family friends. She joined Kayla for a week-long mission trip in November 2024.



Arrive Team Helps Afghan Family Thrive

By Gina Eaton

Imagine going about your daily life when, without warning, you and your family must flee to safety taking only the clothes on your backs. Then, from a crowded refugee camp you are sent to another country (that you didn't choose) where you don't know anyone, no longer have a job, have no social network, no cultural familiarity, and don't even speak the language. Now you must humbly trust everything to complete strangers.

Few can begin to imagine living through this. But this is exactly the experience of the Rasooli family from Kabul, Afghanistan – a family escaping the Taliban in the summer of 2024 and entrusted to Arrive Ministries, and to Waterbrooke's own Arrive team.

Arrive Ministries is a Minneapolis-based non-profit refugee resettlement agency that provides essential services and practical assistance to advance self-sufficiency. The U.S. government supplies support to refugees for three months. After that, organizations like Arrive step in with cultivated volunteer teams who go on to extend essential help and friendship so that the refugees have a better chance to thrive in their new homeland.

Bruce Eaton and Steve and Karen Kowalke all had individual and separate experiences with Arrive Ministries first. Once they realized the connection, they began seeking committed participants in 2024.

Because refugees land here in a state of trauma and vulnerability, Arrive requires teams to go through a thorough vetting process with interviews, background checks and training sessions. Waterbrooke's first team is: Steve and Karen Kowalke, Johnny and Yvette Hatch, Bruce and Gina Eaton, Tim Graff, Ralph

Above is a team from Waterbrooke with the refugee family they support. In the front row are: Tamim Rasooli, Maryam Rasooli, Naim Rasooli, Sohaila Rasooli, Pastor Kevin Dibbley, Bastian Hatch, Ralph Dvorak, Karen Kowalke, Jacob Pearson, Grace Pearson, and Sophia Pearson. In the back row are: Marwa Rasooli, Yvette Hatch, MariAnne Dibbley, Johnny Hatch, Margaux Hatch, Bruce Eaton, Steve Kowalke, Molly Dvorak, Tim Graff, and Gina Eaton. Mehria Rasooli is not pictured.

Dvorak, Sandy Esters, MariAnne Dibbley, and Sophia Pearson.

In fall of 2024 the team got their first assignment: the Rasooli family, which includes two parents and four kids under age 15. Mr. Rasooli had worked in the Afghan government and military, which made him a prime target for the Taliban. He tearfully confided how his best friend was assassinated.

Since last fall, the team has helped with resume writing and finding a job; financial aid and healthcare applications; phones and utilities; finding appropriate winter clothing; having meals together; school enrollment; learning to drive and taking the bus; and helping get through the long, cold winter without cabin fever. All help that is essential for them to thrive.

The team members take turns visiting and helping the Rasoolis every week. This will continue until the refugees are confident enough to not need help. The long-term hope is to demonstrate God's love while nurturing a life-long friendship. ♦

Gina Eaton and her husband Bruce have attended Waterbrooke since its launch in 2000. Scrabble is her favorite game, and her favorite authors are Charles Dickens and J.K. Rowling.

Book Review: *Following Jesus in a Digital Age*

By Laurel Barto

Following Jesus in a Digital Age offers a simple, direct diagnosis of the impacts of technology. In it author Jason Thacker provides clear ways to respond to that impact in a godly manner. He thoroughly examines the problems with technology's rising influence on the culture and offers applicable ways in which the church can address these issues.

The book focuses on the growing impact of technology in our lives and specific ways to apply biblical wisdom to the concept of technology.

"We are each being disciplined every day by the technologies that we use," says Thacker, who vulnerably and humbly shares connections to technology in his personal life. He explores the gritty reality of technology's effects on our culture in contrast to the bright hope that is offered to believers in the person and work of Christ Jesus. He argues that understanding the impact of technology is important because technology challenges not only how we interact with our neighbors but also how we follow Jesus.

In *Following Jesus in a Digital Age*, Thacker points to efficiency as the primary allure of technology. He also defines technology very broadly, explaining that it is "a whole way we've been trained, a whole orientation we walk in, a whole web of relations that does nothing but breed faster and faster – all built to remove any trace of inefficiency, difficulty, obstacles, or friction in our lives." Understanding this key aspect of technology helps us understand why it is so enticing and why technology has become increasingly more involved in every corner of our culture.

Thacker encourages readers to look to biblical wisdom when navigating technology. He says that "wisdom is a key to understanding how God calls His people to act in a world saturated by technology" because it "orients us to the path of God so that we might walk in it." Wisdom gives believers hope in a world that is dominated by hopelessness.

Thacker describes wisdom as "calling out to us in the streets, especially the digital public square, to remember these truths and to seek to live lives of godliness throughout our days." Wisdom helps us rip our gaze from the cultural hyper fixation towards efficiency and novelty and then refocus on glorifying God and making His name known to others.

Thacker's book also offers ways in which we can use

biblical wisdom to pursue truth in a culture that is saturated by lies.

"One of the most devastating effects of technology on society has been the breakdown, if not a full-on crisis, of what is considered true," Thacker says. He describes our current cultural state as a "post-truth, tech-dependent society." Some technological "symptoms" of this society are misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, propaganda, video manipulation, and deep fakes. These symptoms are enabled by the prevalence and free reign of technology.

Despite the increasing breakdown of objective truth and prevalence of unethical technologies, there are still ways the church can pursue hope.

"As each new wave of technological innovation washes over our society, we have the power – like no other community on earth does – to step into the moral wake it leaves and light the path of the transcendent truth of God and true reality," Thacker says. To the world that has hidden objective truth in a web of subjectivity and the powerful capabilities of



technology, Christians can point to God as a source of transcendent truth and ultimate authority.

Following Jesus in a Digital Age is a thoughtful, intentional, sobering and yet encouraging book that serves as an invaluable resource to the church. It offers significant ways in which believers can honor God and approach technology virtuously, viewing it as a tool and not a vice. Thacker is honest about the effects of technology, yet he avoids a doomsday approach by offering hope to the reader. His analysis is rooted in thoughtful research and intentional employment of biblical truths in relation to the problems discussed. ♦

Laurel Barto grew up attending Waterbrooke Church and playing piano on the worship team. She currently lives in Kentucky where she is studying biblical counseling at Boyce College and is a member of Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville.

Building Expansion Project Underway

Waterbrooke Church broke ground on the building expansion project in November, and the first phase is well underway. At press time, the footings and foundations have been poured and the next steps are back-filling and then framing.

If you have any questions about the project, feel free to reach out to Casey Campbell (pictured at right in front of the construction site). Casey is Waterbrooke's construction liaison and can be contacted at casey.f.campbell@gmail.com or (952) 818-4013.

If you'd like to contribute financially to the "Grow by the Water" church expansion, just visit waterbrooke.church/give and use the drop-down menu to select that fund. ♦



Casey Campbell

Quotables

"Heaven touches down on planet earth through our gathered churches. And when this happens, you offer the citizens of your nation the hope of a better nation, the residents of your city the hope of a better and lasting city. No matter what challenges you face as an American or non-American, ethnic minority or majority, rich or poor, your hope for a just and peaceful society should not rest on the kingdoms of this world. It should rest on the King Himself, Who is establishing His heavenly kingdom in the outposts we call the local church."

-Jonathan Leeman, 9Marks Ministry

"The local church is nothing less than the embassy of the high King of Heaven in this rebellious world."

-Greg Gilbert, pastor and author

"We meet together as redeemed saints to remind each other Whose we are, how we got here, and why it matters."

-Bob Kauflin, Sovereign Grace Music

"The glory of God is available to you in the church in a way it's not available to you anywhere else. There is no more important means of discipleship than deep involvement in the life of the church."

-Timothy Keller, pastor and author (1950-2023)

"Like a branch that grows because of its connection to the tree, we thrive when we stay connected to the church."

-Stephen J. Nichols, Ligonier Ministries

"The church is a Trinitarian re-creation: the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit."

-Gregg R. Allison, professor and author