

Worshipping as Family; Keeping a Baptismal Promise

You might say the Total family “totally gets it” when it comes to worshipping as a family. I recently asked all five family members, who are usually seen sitting in the front row on Sunday mornings, three questions about worshipping together as a family. It is obvious to me that they talk about this at home, because I spoke to each family member individually and they often said the same things in different ways. I totally admire this family and their commitment to growing together in faith. ~ Kim Rathjen



1. Why do you think it is important to worship together as a family?

Kari (Mom) – It connects us as a family and is a centered time for us to be together without all of the distractions that a family with three kids has. We all grow in our faith and can talk about what we experienced because we’ve all been in the same place in worship.

Joe (8th grade) – It’s important to do together. For most of the other things we do at church we are separated. Like when I go to confirmation it is something I am doing by myself and not with my family.

Elli (7th grade) – It’s better to worship as a family because we grow in faith together. It helps us pray together at home.

Nick (3rd grade) – Mom wants us to be together – she likes it when we do things together.

Tom (Dad) – It is something I have done my whole life – worshipping with my whole family – I wouldn’t think of not doing it because it strengthens our family bond.

2. Why does your family sit in the front row?

Tom – I’ve always sat in the front row. In my family growing up there were seven kids plus parents. The front row was the only place we could always find room to all sit together. There’s always room in the front row!

Elli – You can get into the worship service when you are sitting in the front row. My parents want us to participate and to not sit in back where there might be other people talking or distracting us.

Nick – I don’t know, but I like it because in the back I can barely hear.

Kari – The kids have to pay attention to what’s happening when we are in the front row. I also really like the eye contact you get from the pastors when sitting in the front. It’s pretty powerful to catch Pastor Paul’s eye when you are both saying the Apostle’s Creed together.

Joe – It’s like front row seats at a game – you want to sit in the front to be close to the action. We also get to be first for communion.

3. What advice would you give to families who find it hard to worship together regularly?

Joe – Schedule your activities after church so there aren’t any conflicts. And if you have to, go to worship on Saturday night or at the 8 a.m. service on Sunday.

Elli – Get involved in other things at church too. Do service projects, help teach Sunday school, pray at home, get to know the pastors – those things will help you grow in faith and you’ll want to go to worship.

Kari – It’s not always easy because we are involved in a lot of things at church on Sunday mornings. We are trying to teach our kids to serve their church family, but it’s important to make the effort because it is a time for us to connect as a family. My favorite Sunday is Everybody Worship Sunday because then we can just come to church and worship together.

Tom – Worshipping together is an easier choice than people think. You just do it and the rewards are great.

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We continue to highlight the stories of families who worship together, by talking with the Gambino family:

Dominic, Tamara and their three children, Nick (11), Sienna (9) and Michael (6). The Gambinos are a busy sports family, so I was happy to catch up with them on a Thursday evening in August, between seasons!

Dom and Tamara have been part of the Immanuel community since they returned to Minnesota from Connecticut in the fall of 1999. The two of them come from quite different religious backgrounds. Dom was raised Catholic, mostly by his grandparents, who had a deep faith, but didn't often attend worship. Tamara was raised Lutheran, in a South Dakota farming community, where her family went to church every Sunday and were actively involved in their congregation.

They met and married in Connecticut, and that's where Nick and Sienna were born and baptized. Tamara's influence prevailed, and the two of them continued the habit of weekly worship. "It was 'weird' to go to church there," Tamara said. "Nobody else did it." If they got a call from friends on Sunday morning and weren't home to answer it, their friends couldn't figure out where they could be! The first Christmas of Nick's life, he played the part of Baby Jesus, while his mom and dad were Mary and Joseph. When their careers brought them back to Minnesota, they landed in Eden Prairie. That first fall they received a postcard inviting them to worship at Immanuel. And the rest, as they say, is history. Most every Sunday you will find them at the 9:30 service, on the Servant Song side, toward the front. The kids attend 11 a.m. Sunday School, which Tamara teaches.

When I asked them about the challenges of worshipping as family of five, Dom said it really wasn't a challenge for them, except getting there on time! Tamara used to have to bring a bag of snacks and toys to supplement the Rainbow bags, but now the kids have outgrown that need. They both talked about "routine" – that worshipping every Sunday is "just what you do." It's not hard, because it's what they've always done. They notice how their kids' participation has changed as they've grown. Nick can take Holy Communion now and is more attuned to the sermon. Sienna likes the special music and when the pastors tell stories! Michael still needs occasional water breaks, but that's ok with them – and me! The Gambinos are an affectionate family; snuggling up with mom and dad during worship is something they all enjoy!

One of the tips that Dom and Tamara offer is to get involved in a faith group. Their faith group has really helped all five of them build relationships with other Immanuel families, so that they know they'll see friends when they come to church! (NOTE: if you want to be part of a faith group, contact MaryKay (marykay@immanuel.us)). And parents should help their kids participate – reading along with the scripture passages, singing along with the hymns, showing them how to follow the bulletin. Dom and Tamara set the standard for their kids regarding church behavior and find that the older ones are now setting a good example for Michael. The benefits of worshipping together as a family are lifelong, says Dominic. "We're experiencing worship together and we're growing faith together. It's not something we'll ever outgrow, no matter how the kids grow. Thirty years from now, we can still be worshipping together." Finally Tamara says, "If I don't go to church, I miss it." As a dedicated Sunday School teacher, she knows the importance not just of worshipping, but worshipping...as a family!



Pastor Susan

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“Train up a child in the way s/he should go...”

When parents bring little ones to the baptismal font, one of the promises they make is to “bring her/him to the services of God’s house.” That means bringing them to weekly worship, in the sanctuary, with the community of faith. Some parents find that keeping that promise is harder than they imagined, so we’re going to be talking to families who make it work, to see what we can learn from them.



Dan and Lisa Boyum were both raised in families that worshipped together every Sunday. Dan has powerful memories of sitting next to his own dad, hearing him sing, listening to him speak the words of the prayers and the creed. He is working to be that kind of example to his three boys: Zachary (13), Isaac (11) and Matthew (7). The Boyums began attending Immanuel in 1995, when Zachary was just a baby. Neighbors advised them that, “when you have little kids, you’ll quit going to church. It’s just too hard.” Nothing could be further from the truth for this family. You’ll see them – all five of them – almost every Sunday (Saturday night if there’s something going Sunday) towards the back on the front side – at the 8 a.m. service!

I asked Lisa why they make the effort. “It’s our job,” she said, and then she quoted the verse above, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6, RSV). “I can’t make their choices when they’re older, I can only pave the path for them and trust that they will choose it. Whatever they choose, I know that I will have done what I was instructed to do.”

Both Dan and Lisa talked about the power of routine and deeply ingrained habits. “Going to church is just what we do, just as much as the kids going to school.” They trust that the things the boys hear in worship, and the experience of worshipping with their family, will give them a foundation that will help equip them to live their faith instead of conforming to the world.

How do they manage? A few tips: put a parent between each child, let them read or draw or do math problems quietly. Take them to worship early, *before* Sunday School, while they’re still pretty mellow and you don’t have to settle them down. Don’t worry so much about kids’ behavior bothering others; people aren’t as judgmental as we might think. Lisa suggested parents try it a couple times a month, and then stick with it, because eventually the kids will get it. “And remember,” she says, “the time when your children are small is a very short season of your life.”

Check for them one of the next Sundays. Zachary will be taking sermon notes (Dan is his confirmation guide). Isaac sometimes sings along with the pastor’s part of the liturgy. Matthew, who is just learning to read, likes to practice by reading stories in the Bible. Dan and Lisa will be singing and reading and praying alongside their sons. They’re together for a quiet hour every Sunday, because they’re worshipping ... as a family.

Pastor Susan

Worshipping with Children and Grand-Children

For Floyd and Jacquie Hagen, it's all about passing on the gifts you have been given. That's why it's always been so important to bring their children, and now their grandchildren, to worship. Floyd and Jacquie grew up in households where church was a given on Sunday, but it was even more than that, the day began with church, the worship service, the fellowship, but that was followed by families and friends getting together, sitting down for Sunday dinner, spending the day enjoying the people they loved. This was a day to attend to priorities, God and family, a day to renew and strengthen those relationships.



When Floyd and Jacquie had their own children, they were determined to continue passing on the blessings of faith and family, blessings that are so closely related. So they made Sabbath time each Sunday a sacred priority that included sharing a special breakfast, worshipping together, spending time connecting with faithful friends (their children often complained “why do we always have to be the last ones to leave church?”) and Sunday dinners together, often with extended family and friends.

In fact, preparation for this special day would begin the night before with taking baths, shining shoes, and making sure each child's “Sunday best” was ready for wear in the morning. This was a time for family and it was a time for faith, no exceptions, no questions asked. Except for the question the kids would sometimes ask Jacquie in church, “Mom, how come you sing like an angel and dad sings like a frog?”

Floyd and Jacquie raised their family wanting their kids to know Jesus, to grow in faith, and they did what they could to make that happen. They got their kids connected to God and God's people. During the week they might all be scattered, running here, each in their own direction, with their own agendas, but come Sunday, they were together and focusing on what's important: God and God's people.

Yes, there were times those kids complained about going to church. Yes there were times Floyd and Jacquie wondered if it was making a difference. Floyd saw it like this: If your life is a building, then faith is the firm foundation upon which everything else is built. And each Sunday is another brick in that foundation, individually not so significant, but over time those bricks form the support for our lives, our beliefs, our values. Now, their children are adding to that building of faith, by bringing the next generation to church. Mark, Floyd and Jacquie's youngest son, still attends church each Sunday, here at Immanuel where this journey of faith began for him, only now he comes with his wife Carol and their kids, Jenita, Joshua, Nicholas, and Timothy. Faith is being nurtured in another generation. Floyd and Jacquie's grandkids are finding out that church is a place to belong, a place where they are loved, a place where they learn about Jesus and his love. For Jacquie, when the family is together, filling up that whole row of chairs on Sunday morning, that is a highlight of her week, that the importance of faith and family is being lived out once again.

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