

GROWING *Together*

ISSN: 1920-8677

DISCOVERING THE JOY OF COMMUNITY

Sam and Susan are loving partners who share a wonderful life together. Susan's scientific background gives her a deep appreciation for the natural world and raises many questions about the existence of God. Although Sam does not practise his faith in any formal way, he keeps a Bible on his bookshelf and prays occasionally.

Both he and Susan are beginning to wonder if there might be something more. They're starting to ask, "Are individual practices enough to sustain a person's spiritual life?" They notice the small church in their neighbourhood advertising a community barbecue. They've seen people coming in and out of the building. Curious, they decide to give it a try. Soon they become regular attenders.

Though sometimes disillusioned with the institutional church, many today – like Sam and Susan – are connecting with fellow "seekers" in local faith communities which offer opportunities to worship, learn and, most importantly, to share meaningful relationships with one another. This should not surprise us. When Jesus announced the coming of his kingdom, he clearly envisioned the formation of a new community – an inclusive community that would transcend differences of gender (Luke 8:1-3), age (Mark 10:13-16), income (Luke 5:20-21), cultural background (John 4:7-42), physical ability (Matthew 9:2-8), and moral virtue (Matthew 9:10-13). Jesus' vision for God's bright new world did not focus on individuals living in isolation but on people coming together in relationships based on justice and love.

The English poet John Donne once wrote that "no man is an island." He knew that we are all interconnected, and these connections make our lives so much richer and more meaningful than they would otherwise be.

Community is never easy. It's hard to appreciate diversity, and difficult to listen to others – especially when we disagree on important matters. Hardest of all are the many annoyances that arise from day-to-day living

with those who are different from ourselves. And yet, it is in the crucible of community that our characters are shaped and formed. As we learn to love others, the way God loves us, we begin to have a greater vision. We become more accepting of others, more skilled at negotiating our differences. This extends beyond the local church to friends in other denominations, to those of other religious faiths and those with no faith at all.

Sam and Susan understand the church they attend is not perfect. But they are also finding much that is good. When Susan was diagnosed with cancer, she was amazed by the support she received. Lately Susan has been attending a Bible study group where she's discovering that she is not the only one with questions. She finds that the opportunity to learn from others' insight and experience is helping her to grow in her own relationship with God.

Meanwhile, Sam is preparing to leave for a short-term mission trip. He's hopeful that getting to know others in a different culture, and working alongside them for a time, will not only benefit others but enrich his life too. He's beginning to see that faith really does stretch the boundaries, calling us to a larger world of neighbour-love.

Sam and Susan are discovering the joy of community! They are learning that, indeed, no one is an island. Sam and Susan could be any number of people in your neighbourhood, eager to discover something richer together than they have by themselves. When they arrive at the door of your community of faith, will you be ready to receive them?



Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 12:12-27; John 17:20-26, Acts 2:43-47

Questions for discussion:

1. What joys have you experienced in belonging to a community of faith? What are some of the challenges or disappointments?
2. Are individual practices enough to sustain a person's spiritual life? Why or why not?
3. How can your church be more welcoming of folks like Sam and Susan?

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ's faithful.

Prairie Centre for Ecumenism
600 - 45th Street West
Saskatoon, SK S7L 5W9
CANADA © 2011



Gathering the Family of Jesus

phone: (306)-653-1633
fax: (306) 653-1821
email: pce@ecumenism.net
www.ecumenism.net