

“BE EXPECTANT!”  
By Rom A. Pegram (10/14/18)

Karen & Jennifer are best friends. Their friendship began in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and continued throughout high school & college. In fact these two women chose a college where they could pursue their individual academic goals, yet still stay together as friends. They chose Union University in Jackson, Tennessee—both doing well in their respective fields.

Karen & Jennifer are extremely smart individuals, finishing their course work in 4 years each. This was actually easy for both, but graduation was difficult for them. They had 5 job offers between them, but graduation meant they'd have to finally separate. None of their job offers were in the same cities. They knew this day would eventually come. As a matter of fact, they'd talked about this reality ... that someday they'd more than likely be separated because of either jobs or husbands (or both). Well, they were right...

But, there was reason for celebration, too. They both ended up with their dream jobs! *But, how much further apart could they be and still be in the United States?* Not, much. You see, Karen moved to south Florida ... and Jennifer moved to Washington State.

Both Karen & Jennifer are Christians. And, unlike the majority of those who've dropped out of church through their college years, these two women *did not*. They'd both been active in their church all the way through college...

**Karen in Florida:** Though Karen misses Jennifer, she is very happy with her move to south Florida. She loves the sunshine & the warmth that that location offers. As a matter of fact, she found out that she has SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), so the year-round sunshine is just what she needed personally.

Karen began looking for a church soon after she moved to Florida. She found a Southern Baptist church that 'felt comfortable' to her and she joined the church after visiting for just a few weeks. Being a life-long Southern Baptist, it just seemed like the right thing to do...

She was asked what was involved in joining her church. She said that basically she just went forward one Sunday when the invitation to join was given. She filled out an information card. Then, at the end of the service the church members came to the front and welcomed her. 'And then what?' Nothing else. No new member's class-preparation for membership, no small group connection, no ministry involvement process, no follow-up...

Karen dropped out of the church after 7 months and has not returned to *any* church. When asked about that, she said that she didn't really feel guilty because there was so much to do in south Florida on Sunday ... but the look on her face betrayed her words.

**Jennifer in Washington:** Jennifer had an adventurous spirit. She had never travelled to the Northwest ... until interviewing for this job. She loved moving to a new area and new culture, even though she had deep West Tennessee roots. Something about 'making fun of her southern drawl' was mentioned...

After hearing about Karen's church experience, those working on Essential Church were a bit apprehensive and, quite frankly, expected the worst from Jennifer. Well, they were surprised. Jennifer said that she was currently involved in a most wonderful church! She couldn't find a Southern Baptist church to attend, so she'd joined an independent church that had similar beliefs.

When asked if she was currently active, Jennifer responded that when she'd left the south, she found herself in deep need of Christian fellowship. It took her awhile, but when she found her church she said it was LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT! "I have never been in a place with more dedicated believers!" was her response.

When asked about her process of becoming a member, here's what Jennifer had to say: "It's a high-expectation church. ... You apply for membership and then attend a 4-hour membership class on either 4 consecutive Sundays mornings or one Saturday morning." As continued speaking to her interviewers, she became even more excited as she went on: She said that they packed a lot in the time they had together and explained, "They tell you about the mission of the church. They speak about 30 minutes on the history of the church and connected it to the mission. They talked about their small-group structure and how we are *expected* [italics mine] to be a part of it. And they really emphasized their outreach in the community and in the world." She concluded, "I have never been to a church where they make so clear what is expected of you and why it is expected. They spent the last hour telling us what membership at our church looks like."

Folks, can you see what happened here ... in this 'Tale of Two Churches?' In order to be the Essential Church that God is calling us to be, we have to first get our structure right—*simplify*. Then, we have to get our content right—*going deeper* into God's word than we ever have before. Today, we continue learning how to be the Essential Church ... by getting our attitude right—having one of *expectation*...

Folks, no one had *expectations* like Jesus did! He has never and will never force anyone to be his disciple. BUT (There's always a 'but,' isn't there?) ... IF YOU WANT TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST, THERE WILL BE *EXPECTATIONS*! And since the Church is the Body of Christ on earth, we are to have the same attitudes about our work in the kingdom today; we are to be a reflection of this very nature of God. Listen to Jesus attitude as he tried his best to adjust those of the first disciples (Mark 8:31-38, NLT)...

Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. <sup>32</sup> As he talked about

this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. <sup>33</sup> Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. “Get away from me, Satan!” he said. “You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.” <sup>34</sup> Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup> If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. <sup>36</sup> And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? <sup>37</sup> Is anything worth more than your soul? <sup>38</sup> If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” – Mark 8:31-38 (NLT)

Is our attitude all about God’s Kingdom ... or it still about our self-centered interests? That’s what got Peter in trouble here! Well, here’s the attitude—the very nature of God—that Essential Churches reflect:

**ESSENTIAL CHURCHES STRESS ACTIONABLE MISSION STATEMENTS** (and folks, we have it...). Since we’ve said that this is not only our vision statement but it’s also our strategic process for making disciples, let me explain what each one of these steps in the process mean to us...

- **LOVE.** Every member of Trinity United Methodist Church is expected to be a regular participant in our worship services ... where they will draw closer to and learn even more how to LOVE both God and each other...
- **GROW.** Every member of Trinity United Methodist Church should be involved in some kind of small group—adult Bible study or one of our other small group opportunities that we offer throughout the year (i.e. choirs, missions, etc.) ... in order to ‘connect’ with others in the church and grow in their faith... **YOU CAN’T GROW** (even the people of God) if you’re not intentional about your discipleship—your personal walk with God...
- **SERVE.** Trinity United Methodist Church has several ministry opportunities available through which to serve others. *Once we come to love God* and others by worshiping together regularly ... and *once we’ve learned to grow* through small group opportunities in our church, *this is what follows!* We’re going to *want* to serve God ... by serving others in a significant way! And our expectation is that every member of this church be involved in at least *one* area of serving. And our expectation is that every member of this church be involved in at least *one* area of serving...

Folks, this is what our CONNECTIONS ministry is all about. Patti Cobb & Michelle Large are our ‘Connections Coordinators’ here at TUMC. What they and their team do is absolutely crucial to the future life of this congregation! This position has been called a ‘volunteer coordinator’ in some churches; but, since this pastor doesn’t really like the term ‘volunteer,’ we are instead about ‘connecting’ people to both ... God and others (LOVE) and outreach opportunities (SERVE). Being about these things—making

disciples in this way—is what we’re all about here at TUMC! *Also, our attitude as an Essential Church needs to involve these things...*

**ESSENTIAL CHURCHES STRESS PARTICIPATION IN SMALL GROUPS.** Let me say—one more time—that ‘connecting’ in the Body of Christ ... to both others & to an outreach ministry of some sort ... is all a part of becoming and teaching others to be disciples of Jesus. It’s adopting Jesus’ attitude toward things ... and, thus, getting our Attitude (expectation) right...

**ESSENTIAL CHURCHES STRESS MEMBERSHIP PREPARATION!** You keep hearing about the E.T. Class (Essential Transformation) and that is exactly what this class is all about. Needless to say, the whole idea of ‘membership’ is changing here at TUMC ... and will continue to develop, as we adopt the mind of Christ—the attitude of Christ ... in all we do. *We have to be very intentional about making disciples or we never will ...* and that’s what Christ has called every church to do!

**CONCLUSION:** Did I say earlier that the younger generations of today ... are not their parents or grandparents’ generations? I was brought up on things like denominational loyalty ... and duty to my local church. My parents never would have questioned what the right thing to do was. *But, many in today’s younger generations—unfortunately—simply don’t think the Church matters anymore. It’s not essential...* And, they simply will not waste their time in a church that’s going through the motions...

What are they looking for?

- A church that’s making a difference in the lives of its members...
- A church that’s making a difference in the community and around the world...
- And, a church where *THEY* can make a difference...

**Karen** joined a church where the only membership requirement was to complete a card ... and someone actually did that for her—to make it easy. No one invited her to join a small group (get connected); no one asked her to get involved in a ministry; she never really learned what the church was all about. So she left...

**Jennifer**, on the other hand, learned early on in her experience at her church that she should get involved in a small group. She did and developed close relationships that helped her to stick with the church. Then, out of those same relationships, she found a ministry that she could be happily involved in and serve, making a difference with her life for the Kingdom of God...

Is our attitude all about what God wants in this world of ours? Or, do we still seek just what we want in this world—even in the life of the church? Folks, we’ll be a church who can make a difference in our world; we’ll be a church whose members can make a difference in our communities ... *when we get our attitude right.* Jesus has *great expectations* of each of his disciples ... and we need to learn to live out these *expectations* right here--together. If we do, we’ll be the Essential Church God is calling us to be for the years ahead... Let that be our prayer today!