

Midway Baptist Church Narrative

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12c)

The town of Midway is a paradox. Somehow it holds together multiple identities in one location. Its central crossroad is part road and part railway. The no longer in use train station which made it a popular place to stop 75 years ago is now a bespoke horse harness store. It has tourist boutique shops lining a Main Street that is without a hotel or a church. Main Street in fact doesn't go anywhere being only a few blocks long. There are about 1700 residents, but over 500 seats at the upscale restaurants that line Main Street. There is a small university on a historic campus and a modern elementary school while the community school is now a bakery and senior living units. The town is surrounded by an industrial park and lush green horse farms.

Midway Baptist Church understands and mirrors the paradoxical nature of its community. For some it is the historic baptist church and for others the only church offering contemporary worship in the community. It has members whose families can trace their history back in the life of the church 80 years ago and some who have only been a part for a few years. It has a sanctuary paid off in 1876, but a modern educational building and fellowship hall completed less than 25 years ago.

Perhaps the best way to understand Midway Baptist is to think of it as a quilt and to identify the strings that hold its patchwork pieces together. When attenders were asked to describe their congregation, there were four responses that predominated—loving, welcoming, family and home.

Midway Baptist Church is a loving church. That love threading through it is of course a reflection of Christ's love. When the church was in financial troubles many years ago, each member was assessed an amount that they were expected to give. Folks loved the church so much that they consented to this plan, stayed together, and the church survived. Or more recently, when the church was paying off its building debt, love for the church helped raise \$100,000 in a hundred days. During more recent challenges that arose from some wanting to make the church stringently opposed to homosexuality, the wisdom of the church was to love everyone and not make any official statement recognizing and respecting the variety of views held by its members. The core of the congregation was invested in listening and loving instead of arguing.

This love has expressed itself significantly in the life of the church by a commitment to missions and Christian service. This has manifested itself in significant mission trips that have involved many in the congregation. Trips to Miami to work with underserved children through "Touching Miami With Love", work in Native Lands, and a recent trip to help with flood relief in Eastern Kentucky that saw a large group go. The church participates in a backpack ministry and is currently operating a food pantry.

The church has love and pride for its pastors. The church was first pastored by a Georgetown College student and later by students from Southern Seminary who faithfully arrived on the train each week. They have a history of hiring pastors who connect well with the community. The connection is so strong that during their interim former pastors volunteered to help in any way they could because they love the people as much as the people have loved them.

Midway Baptist Church is a welcoming church. Welcome and openness to each other, the community and the world is the second strand of the thread that holds the quilt together. The church is so welcoming that it at times has led to disruptions as a result. There was the town alcoholic who showed up for worship and could not find the door in and when he finally did fell out of his chair. More recently the mentally challenged man who appeared during worship asking the pastor for a job to rake the church grounds. Most importantly these stories show that people who would not find welcome elsewhere knew that the church was a place where they were welcome.

Evan Rowe, their most recent pastor, challenged the church each Sunday with these words: "Let God be God and you love". This reflected the focus on welcome and grace in the church rather than the judging of others in the congregation. Many of the members say the reason they joined was because someone offered to sit with them or made sure they knew they were welcome.

Midway Baptist Church is a family. This is the third string that binds the patchwork of its members into the body of Christ. When Jamie Broome was pastor, as each person came to the communion table he called them by their name. It was a powerful reminder that each of them was known and loved as a part of Christ's family and the family of Midway Baptist Church.

During difficult pregnancies, the church has been there for those whose families were not local. Presence at the hospital and caring for needs is central to the life of the church. When a former pastor's daughter suffered serious illness, the church stepped in to help with understanding, financial assistance and other forms of support. One member explained that the church has been there through all of their personal mistakes to support them and love them. Another mentioned that they stayed at the church because the people loved their children. Like a family, members of the congregation stand with each other in times of need and celebrate alongside them in times of joy.

Midway Baptist Church is home. The strands of love, welcome and family intertwine into the strong cord of home. One writer describes home as "the place where they have to take you in." Another suggests the distinction that "a house is made of planks and beams, but a home is made of love and dreams." But perhaps the most apt description of what it is like in Midway is "home is heaven for beginners."

In powerful ways, the Kingdom of God is coming each day to Midway and the world through Midway Baptist Church. Jesus is being preached, the Holy Spirit is at work and the reign of God is celebrated. Surely that is home.

If Heaven is a home, then Midway Baptist Church is the patchwork quilt, each part unique and separate but made whole and one, folded beside the fireplace ready to be spread over anyone who needs warmth and comfort by the divine fire. It is a beautiful and useful expression of God's love.