

There was a time, not so long ago; not, at the very least, a time beyond the memories of many of those who still reside with us today; when the church was the center of the everyday lives of its people.

A time before families used couches in front of TV's as meeting places. A time when conversations between Christians happened face to face more often than over a phone, or from one computer to another. A time when the church was the focal point of the community.

The church was a center.

It was a center at which people would meet, work, and eat.

It was where they came to socialize, serve, and pray.

It was the place where they were baptized, confirmed, married, and buried; but it was so much more than that. The church was not merely the requisite place for life's landmarks. It was a place that was constant in the lives of those in the church.

It was the center of people's lives.

It was their center; a center to be held in the midst of ever-changing schedules, cultures, lifestyles, trends, and times.

That center was a focal point; a never shifting North Star used to help in the navigation of the tumultuous sea that is life. A center that would hold even the furthest periphery; no matter the strength or sway of the tides.

A center, in the midst of a community, which held fast the focus of those around it to Christ. A center where, any given night, you could find the people of God doing the work of God.

Today, we acknowledge that the church is a mighty constant. And with this in mind, we examine an exciting opportunity which stands before the people of God. An opportunity presented before us to be a center, a solid foundation; a rock on which those who are pushed about by the waves of troubles may cling to, and stand. It is one where they can receive the relief, support, and promises of Christ and His peoples.

Imagine a place that is God's house, that is His church, that is also the geographic, topical center of the lives in the community around it. Imagine the blessings that would produce, not just to the church, but to the area in which the church resides.

Imagine, any given night, we drive up:

The setting red hues of the Florida sun descends onto a campus which, while not boisterous, buzzes like a hive with the low cheerful hum of activity.

We walk just inside the front entrance. Just inside the doors, there is a place where there are couches, chairs, and a collection of bookshelves filled with books about Christ. Two young people are playing chess in the corner. A few students, waiting for their parents, work on homework at computers. A stranger who has never heard the words of Christ walks up to the campus of Christ the King for a cup of coffee. He sits down, a man from the community, who has never considered God before; he sits there, in Christ the King. He walks over to a desk, where someone is waiting to give him information. He is approached by some others, and they start to talk...

We walk further, and come out into a large high-ceiling room. There we could see generations of people together; a collection of people who have been raised, have been graced, by the church. Grandmother, mother, daughter; together to celebrate in a place where the name of God is proclaimed. They have come together to a place where now, they not only can have their wedding service in the house of the Lord, but also their reception.

A place where now a couple can gather their families to themselves, in order to celebrate and thank God for fifty years of wedded bliss.

Where their children can gather to celebrate their birthdays.

What a blessing that the place of God is not just for their formal services, but for their joyful celebrations as well. What an infiltration God has taken into another aspect of their lives.

Take this same room: imagine it bristles with activity. Imagine the clamoring cries of a playground, only here, inside; the squeaks and elated squeals of children playing. These children are the ones who will, by the grace of God, carry His Word into the future, after we are gone. And now, they spend their recreational time at a place where Christ is praised. Imagine it is your son or daughter, or grandson or granddaughter. Imagine he or she invites his schoolmate to come to hang out. "Where?" the classmate may ask in disbelief.

"At my church," they reply.

Take this same room: imagine that a stage is set in front. Imagine chairs set up, and quiet costumed characters tip-toeing to and fro. Imagine a music director gesturing here and there; placing this person here, and there. The crowd is hushed in courtesy, but there is an electric sense of anticipation around them. A common evening glow lights the edges of their cheeks like candle-light; the room is dim, and necks arch to peer over heads to see their loved ones, as those loved ones scurry like mice into position. It is Christmas, and the program held here no longer needs to turn people away; come one and all and here this unique message of Christ.

Imagine the holidays, where God's people could come together with their Christian brothers and sisters and have a feast together in his name. Where they could all come, like the first Christians in the first century, and break bread and have fellowship in a common place.

We move to another room, into a kitchen, where skillful hands prepare meals. Pots and pans clink and clang like mighty cymbals. Steam and heat brew and churn; large freezer doors pop open and close; and hands pass and pour food for the joyous gatherings of God's people.

In another room, and see there men and women with their heads down, their eyes moving over the Word of God, as they study the Bible with their teacher opening up the meaning of Scripture to their ears and hearts.

In another room, we see a group of people talking assertively; the leaders of the church, asking for the Spirit to send them discernment, as they meet to try and guide Christ the King according to God's will.

In other rooms, groups meet. Young boys and girls: in cub scouts, boy scouts, and Girl scouts; they spend their time in the place of the Lord. There are other meetings; meetings for those who are troubled; those who are struggling in this sinful world, and who seek refuge within the walls we have provided them. Those in AA and Alanon. Those who see that God's church has provided this service for them, and cannot but help be changed by it.

In another room, a young adult group meets, discussing the merits and perils of post-modernism on Christ's church.

In another room, a VBS group sings "Jesus Loves Me", watches "Veggie Tales", and then learns the story of Noah by making arks out of popsicle sticks.

In another room, a collection of new members is told the benefits and grace that is given when they receive the body and blood of Jesus.

In another room, the high school kids practice the synchronized moves that will be in the youth worship service they'll be doing in the fall.

A singles group and a couples group; a seniors group and a youth group; a men's group and a women's group. God's house is full of God's people at all times.

We move farther along, away from the classrooms, and down a hallway. There, two offices, each with Christian counselors, and a waiting room; a refuge for God's troubled, where the help they get will have its foundation in Christ's grace.

Father along still, we pass rooms on the right and left, with God's servants in it, planning lessons, meeting with people, reading God's Word, and doing His work.

And farther still, we enter a large amphi-theater shaped room, where musicians tune and tinker, until the sounds there-in come together to blend into a joyous chorus to the Lord.

And as we walk through this building, with its strong walls, we see another scenario. We see a land ravaged by sea and storm. A place hit by a force of nature: by a hurricane. And here we see the people who now are without homes; the people who have been pushed by wind and rain

from their houses; and we see them flock to this place; we seen them drawn from the outside, back into the center. They come back to the center; to the place, which now serves them, which in its name proclaims Christ as its king. And here we see people being cleansed and fed.

We see people, in their times of dire needs, people of this community, clinging for sustenance. We see the hands of servants of God our there; out there really doing it. No more are these gestures mere platitudes to be contemplated over coffee in classrooms. No more are our sentiments of service mere abstractions. Now we see, in the midst of the destruction, real life which Christ calls for us to do. Now we see us reaching out, to a world that doesn't know God, with his service, and his Word.

It is easy to see how we can reach out; how from the center we can reach out; and bless the mission field we have been placed in.

What a blessing we have. And what, because we are so blessed, a blessing we can be.