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I have been asked to speak for the youngest generation of our church. Neither of my children are particularly eloquent yet, but I've been able to interpret their affection for the church community through their actions when they are here.

Even more telling is the actions of the members of the church. The most wonderful thing about our church is the love and acceptance that both my children and I experience here.

Originally, Michael and I had one main reason that drove us to the decision to bring our children up in the community of Centre church. Simply stated, we want our kids to have an environment that mirrors, reinforces, and enhances the values that we are trying to teach them as their parents.

This relates to the statistics we have all heard stated by the Stewardship Team over the past several weeks. To jog your memory, we have heard the statistics about how children who attend church regularly.....

- have better performance in school,
- more involvement with charitable giving,
- and less of a chance of going through a divorce later in life.
- They also report higher levels of general happiness and life satisfaction.

In my opinion, these are the types of things all parents want for their children. But what it all comes down to for me has less to do with the actual statistics and more to do with the general principle. Of course I want all of these things for my children out of their involvement in our church community, but I am more interested in one thing that is hard to measure or even get statistics for.

In the end, I want my children to be kind people who have respect, understanding, and a desire to help others. I want nothing more than for my children to accept others who are different from themselves, to have a voice in this world and to have the strength and desire to stand up for what they believe is right.

I recently read an article that illustrated this more clearly for me.

The article depicted the story of a mom who brought her son, Max, to see a movie. When the previews frightened Max, who has a disability, he became loud and had trouble staying seated. Others in the audience began calling out insults, and when she and Max left the theater, the audience applauded.

After hearing of the movie theater experience, a fellow church goer who attends the same church as Max and his family, decided to turn a bad experience into a chance to do good.

In her words, "As Christians, we're supposed to love our neighbors as ourselves. I just thought that if it were my child, I would have to find a way to make this right for him." Her solution was to rent

out the Regal Cinema in Kingston for a showing of "Muppets Most Wanted." Close to 300 kids, including many with special needs, will be attending.

When I read this article, I immediately made the connection to my own family and to our church community here at Centre Church. My son, Cameron, has the same disability as Max from the article. While out in public, I have felt judged, isolated and criticized. I have had my parenting skills questioned. When I'm here at church with the boys, I don't experience anything like that. Here, I feel supported, encouraged, and accepted. I don't feel judged and I certainly don't feel as though people question my abilities to do what is right for Cameron. To give you a few examples.....

When I'm at the grocery store and Cameron quickly bolts for the door, people don't try to help. They just stare or shake their heads. They don't protect him. When Cameron tries to bolt out of the Fireside room or out toward the parking lot, people at church nonchalantly move in his path. They protect him so he doesn't get hurt. People at church smile knowingly at me, accepting him for who he is.

These are some of the comments I've heard around town versus those I've heard here at church. While they may seem similar, the meaning behind the words is very different.

Around town I've heard "He's a handful" while at church people say with compassion, "You have your hands full." Judgement vs. compassion.

Around town, I've heard "That kid is out of control" while at church people say "He is such a busy explorer." Lack of understanding and negativity vs. acceptance and constructive thinking.

The importance of my children growing up in this church community where they feel its support, love, and acceptance is crucial. A chance for my younger son, William, to see that his brother deserves to be treated well despite being "different" is something that he will always have here at church. The statistics we have all heard recently are important to me, but THIS means so much more.

So many times, people have said to me, "Wow, you must need a drink at the end of the day!" And while sometimes I certainly do feel that way, at the end of the week, I am able to come here, to church, and leave feeling refreshed. I feel blessed that my children have the opportunity to grow up in this loving, open, accepting and supportive environment.