

EPC's 10th Year Anniversary

When Emmanuel started having open services my wife and I were not looking for a church. We had been attending Redeemer for a couple of years and were very content there. Kate was part of a Redeemer dance group, which offered her great fellowship and a chance to perform and grow as a dancer and choreographer. I was part of a Redeemer fellowship group for singers, which offered great networking opportunities and wonderful chances to perform. If you add to that the solid teaching offered at Redeemer and the high budget of most of its ministries, there didn't seem to be any reason for us to move to another church.

Despite that we found ourselves attending a couple of services at EPC. I don't quite remember why or how we got there. The important thing is that we got there. After our second service Charlie took us out to lunch. Towards the end of the conversation he asked us if we were planning on joining. We didn't know what to say. Charlie picked up on that so he invited us to pray about it. He challenged us to ask God if EPC was the church He wanted us to attend.

Kate and I prayed individually and jointly that week and we received a very clear answer from the Lord: "EPC is where I want you to be."

That was ten years ago.

A lot has happened to us and to EPC since then. It's been quite a ride. If I had to describe the experience in a couple of words, I would use the words "applied Christianity." Let me explain:

Since the beginning EPC did not offer us the luxury to sit on the sidelines as consumers. The church was too small for that and too much was needed from its members. It was clear we were not there just to be served. We were there also to serve. That was a shocking realization for me because I was a fairly new Christian and up to then I had been mostly on the receiving end of mercy and grace. I was now on the giving end.

I call that applied Christianity and applied Christianity can be very messy and challenging.

Like the Saturday that I found myself in our storage room up there on the 7th floor at 1 am fixing the sound equipment so we could have amplification the next day. I had been working on it for two days. My back was hurting. I was in a bad mood. My wife was angry with me. I started thinking: "I don't need this". But later when I prayed about it God responded: "Yes Juan, you need this. You need it because my Church needs it." That was humbling.

Then there was the first Angel Tree at EPC. As the coordinator I ended up putting my life on hold for month or so dealing with a staggering amount of work. The event concluded with a party in this space. It was perfect. I was exhausted but thrilled with the results.

And then in the middle of the party two of our members expressed deep dissatisfaction over a costume choice made by a guest. The festive mood turned sour very quickly, at least for me. "How dare they complain," I thought. "After all I've done. Unbelievable! I don't need this." "Oh yes," said the Lord, "you need this. You will talk to those members. You will respect them. You will love them. And you will coordinate Angle Tree again next year."

There have been many other messy and challenging situations for me here at EPC; for me and for all other members who have not stayed on the sidelines. That's the way things are in this church and all other churches. Especially the ones in which Christ is acknowledged as the Son of God and the Bible is acknowledged as the Word of God.

Why, then, should anyone get involved at EPC or any other church for that matter? If you want a complete and balanced, and theologically sound answer, you should contact Charlie or Scott. The incomplete answer that I can give you today based on my 10 years at Emmanuel is strikingly simple: "You need this, you need to be part of a church, and the more you think you don't need it, the more you need it."

Today I thank God for giving us this Church.