

*What does God require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. — Micah 6:8*

## The Beauty of Something Small

Pullen is a church that makes headlines. I don't think we try to be newsworthy, but historically our congregation has made decisions that the outside world noticed. We were reminded of that once again on Saturday, September 20, when *The New York Times* published a feature article about Pullen (thanks to the Keel family for their courage in being interviewed for the piece).

Even within the walls of our church we tend to take note of the big stuff that is happening. We highlight our international partnerships with friends in Cuba, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, and the Republic of Georgia. The backdoor ministry and other outreach efforts are known to most of us. Our new building addition has certainly become a central conversation item in recent years.

Yet, if you really want to know where the heart beat of the church is you must look at the small group experiences. Sunday school classes, mission groups, support groups, and many more are where the real action is. And because the nature of a small group is insular and low-key, the larger church doesn't always have an awareness of what is happening in those places. So, at the risk of neglecting dozens of worthy small groups at Pullen, I want to tell you about three of them.

### Circle of Trust Retreats

In late 2006 the Spiritual Life Group invited Pullenites to take part in a series of retreats modeled after Parker Palmer's Circles of Trust (Palmer's book *A Hidden Wholeness* describes this process). About fifteen Pullen people signed up. The initial retreat was led by Janice Virtue who works at Duke Divinity School and leads Circles of Trust around the country. She informed us that this model had not been tried in local congregations and was curious to see how our group would fare.

For the last two years Suzanne Hayes and I have facilitated quarterly retreats for the group at Cedar Cross (the retreat center operated by John and Margaret Hilpert). The experience has been deeply moving and soul satisfying. The group will conclude its second year of "retreating" in November and then decide how it might promote this model to others in the church.

### Welcome to Pullen

For more than five years something simple but special has been happening one Thursday night a month. Steve and Rachel Smith host a potluck dinner in their home for newcomers to Pullen. Several veteran church members are always present (George Reed brings the wine, which makes him indispensable), and usually a few new people come.

There is no agenda or formal presentation, just a relaxed evening of evening of good food and good conversation. The

new folks ask questions about Pullen and the veterans do their best to answer (not always in complete agreement with each other, as you would expect of a Pullen gathering). Steve recently noted the high percentage of people who come to Welcome to Pullen who end up getting actively involved in our church life. It must be George's wine.

### GLBT/SA Support Group

Several years ago the Congregational Care Council formed a support group for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender folks and their straight allies. Since then, on the third Monday of each month, something sacred has taken place. People come to share their stories, their heartaches, their losses, and their triumphs. The bonds that have formed between the group members are deep and abiding, and each month new friends appear who are looking for a safe and supportive place.

Vickie Leigh facilitated the group until recently and Jill Keel now does a marvelous job of guiding the confidential meetings. Every month when the support group concludes its time together I whisper a prayer of thanksgiving for what I have just witnessed and experienced. It is truly a special group of people.

Regardless of how much news our church makes, the true lifeblood of the congregation is in groups like these. And it always will be.

—Jack