



## **Moving beyond worship service into Community Life – January/February 2010**



Gail and I came to Cincinnati nearly 10 years ago to plant a church with the help of a parent church in Norwood. To our surprise, the congregation in Norwood lost interest in planting a daughter church when their Pastor left (just after we bought our first house). Feeling abandoned, we sought out a church to attend. We tested many churches and eventually “settled” for Hope Church.

Because we had bounced from church to church in search of a home, we were not connected to many believers. Our spiritual lives were dry and our marriage was struggling. We found that we could not be all that God intended for us to become without the love, nurture, and support of a local church body. I Corinthians 12 reminded us that “the hand can not say to the foot, “I do not need you.”” No individual, no matter how vibrant their personal walk, can function well without the body. God so designed the body of Christ that we must be attached to the Head (Christ), within the context of the body.

We finally settled into Hope Church and began worship services for about 9 months. We enjoyed the teaching and worship very much, but still sensed a need for intimacy with other believers. One week the Pastor of Adult Ministries, Steve Lizzio, preached on “Community life.” He encouraged us to get connected in community and begin to build relationships in order to better experience God’s love and plan for our lives. Steve directed us to the Young Families Community where we met fellow strugglers in our life stage.

Gail and I immediately jumped in with both feet. Not only did we meet in our Community on Sunday’s and for activities, but we also joined into one of the two small group Bible studies within Young Families. Finally, we found proper connection to the Head THROUGH the body of Christ. We have developed life-long, life altering relationships.

The Young Families midsize group has a long standing tradition of providing meals for each other for two months after the birth of every child. Many of us have known each other long enough to have been together when each child was born. We take our roles as spiritual Aunts and Uncles quite seriously. We have the freedom to comfort one another with the comfort with which God comforts us, and the freedom to lovingly confront one another.

I must say we have really appreciated being part of our midsize community and our small group. Ephesians chapter 4 teaches how the body of Christ builds itself up in love by that which every joint supplies. Passages on spiritual gifts led us to realize that not all spiritual gifts find expression in a small group. Eight adults committed in small group does not constitute a large enough group where all spiritual gifts are expressed whereas, 40-60 adults in community does. In Hope Young Families, we share child-rearing tips, swap child-care for date nights, share common struggles, comfort the discouraged, strengthen the weak, pray for the hurting, and cry with the grieving. We share a greater pool of godly wisdom.

When we struggled to get pregnant, our Young Families Community laid hands on us and prayed for us without ceasing. They took our burden on as their own. When our basement flooded, they helped us mitigate the water and donated money to help us pay the insurance deductible (God supplied through them to the exact penny). When my business struggled last winter, Hope Church helped us buy food.

For the first time in our lives, we truly sense the family dynamic that God had always intended to exist within the church. We are engaged in relationships where we regularly have opportunity to lavish God's love upon others, and they incarnate Christ with us. Our community and small group Bible study have made an eternal impact upon us; and we are grateful!

God willing, we hope to still be with our community friends as Hope Old Marrieds!

**Steve and Gail Jones** currently lead one of the (now 5!) small groups within the Young Families Community at Hope Church in Mason, Ohio. Steve also serves on the Teaching Team within the broader community ministry. Finally, Steve really enjoys being a "spiritual" Uncle to many of kids in their community and small group!