

Hospitality a key component of discipleship at Reynolds UMC

One Matters

Reynolds United Methodist Church

Ashton, Illinois

In a rural area where family roots and memories run deep, Reynolds UMC faces an unusual set of challenges. Most of the churches in the area are located in the small towns that dot the landscape, a landscape marked in grids by rows of corn or soybeans.

For 154 years, Reynolds has stood “outside the city gates”, almost five miles outside of the nearest town, functioning in some ways more like a regional suburban church, drawing people together from different towns and from the countryside between them. Without the natural traffic of being “the UMC in town”, intentional, even radical, hospitality has been the key component to welcoming the relatively rare unaffiliated visitor into a deeper relationship with Jesus and into covenant membership as part of the Church.



“When we came, it just felt like home”, said Gene Hodges, who became a member by in 2017, “the people are just so welcoming.” Hodges visited along with his fiancée Hannah Weiler in the second half of 2016. Hannah, who had been confirmed in the UMC years earlier, but was no longer listed as a member of any congregation, then invited her sister Andrea Borell, who brought along her husband, Bryan and their nephew, Bradley. Before too long, Hannah and Andrea’s parents, Donna and Ed Weiler were attending too. Although the Weilers had been UMC members in the past, moves and changes in their lives had led to them being lifted from the rolls in their previous church and left them feeling spiritually “homeless”.

Reynolds pastor Seamus Enright considers this “evangelism of hospitality” to be an essential part of the Church’s witness. “People go away from the Church for many reasons“, he said, “In an era of nones and dones, welcoming folks without shame, making space for them (even if it means giving up “your” pew!) and inviting them to be a part of a spiritual family is one of the most basic things we can do to make disciples.” He adds, “if we can’t reflect the love of Christ inside

our walls, how can we hope to present it effectively to the world?" Hospitality is one way that Reynolds practices its discipleship while also leading people to Christ.

After completing a New Members course centered on covenant, all six decided to become members by profession of faith. Not long afterwards, Reynolds was privileged to participate in the baptism of Bryan and Andrea's second child, Nicole Elizabeth Borell, and celebrate the wedding of Gene and Hannah. All of them have become dedicated volunteers in extending the hospitality they received to new visitors and continue to grow in grace through their regular participation in the ministries of the Church, the study of the Word, and the worship of the Lord.