

Ted Bond: Thriving in Community

As a member of the Community Church of Durham, the importance that is held within the very name of our church is not lost on me. *Community* is the first word in the name of this church, and that in its essence is who we are: a community. One that extends beyond the Sunday services and permeates into the lives and well-being of all humans regardless of proximity or distance. The church accomplishes this through inclusion and acceptance of all people.

When I think of the Community Church of Durham, I am immediately reminded not of a physical place, but a space within me that experiences healthy spirituality in itself. A feeling that my being is nurtured by the very nature and existence of this community. The vibrancy and reach of the church's welcome to all who have a heart that beats and lungs that breathe is remarkable. The openness and acceptance is palpable, real, and something that is accomplished in very few places.

Before attending the Table services in October 2024, I was fairly convinced that such a place did not exist. That there may not be a group of people where I feel safe enough to share my spirituality and be seen in a vulnerable way. But now I have found that the love within this place is powerful. There is no element of rejection based on what you believe or any demand for a change within you to occur. You are supported. Not only as an individual, but in your relationship to the divine. What you believe is secondary to the level of acceptance and community which has been built for your participation. Community Church of Durham is not exclusionary and does not require you to have certain beliefs. You are welcome.

This simplistic message of the church is the message that informs the community's structure in all that we do. You are free to cultivate your spirituality without reproach. And you are listened to by ears that are curious and open to your perspective. By definition you are not excluded. The extent to which you are accepted and valued even before you walk in is distinctly real and expresses the openness for anyone to enter this sanctuary.

It is also true that you do not have to come to services on Sunday in order to participate within this community. I have met just as many people throughout the varying programs that the church helps to facilitate and support that are not inherently designed to be about your faith. Rather the expression of values is what gets communicated the most.

The relationships that I have made throughout the church are a source of love and have become an essential part of my life. At its core, we are a passionate group of people who in coming together are fully supportive of you personally and the development of your spiritual journey. Through this level of acceptance and inclusion we are able to accomplish powerful change inside and outside the church. It's a place where it's safe to cultivate your relationship with the Holy. There is an openness rarely found in the current state of our present world.

The experience at Community Church of Durham that I'm talking about cannot be accurately described in words. The love here is real and needs to be directly felt in order to fully understand the essence of this community.