Carol*

Jeffrey D. Oldham

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This year's church goals described some of the ways we wanted this church to grow this year. Today, we'll look at how this church is helping three and a half year old Carol grow. With her mother Karen, she attends the 8am worship service and then children's church. (Two weeks ago, I had the privilege of playing with her and her sixteen-month-old sister Sarah.)

Two days ago, the gospel reading included this passage where Jesus gathers a child in his arms (Mark 9:36–37a):

> He took a child and had her stand in front of [the disciples]. He put his arms around her and said to them, "Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me." (TEV with changed pronoun)

How is this church welcoming Carol and helping her grow? First, at the early service, she interacts with a wide variety of ages, races, and cultures. Some worshipers are old enough to be her great-grandparents, and some were born on the other side of the planet. She learns to shake hands with these people, and they share their love with her.

Second, she's learning about music. One Sunday, she watched our new choir director Theresa Smith play the grand piano. She saw Terri's fingers run across the keys, saw how the strings move, and heard the resulting sounds. Last Sunday, she watched Jerel Ellison play the organ. She also sings the hymns.

Third, she hears God's word as read by the liturgist and presented in Carl's sermon. In some churches, the entire service, much less the sermon,

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would be considered too difficult for her, but, in our church, she is invited to participate.

Fourth, she colors the children's bulletins made available by Christian Education Director Peggy Dile every Sunday. These bulletins complement the subsequent children's church, which Peggy leads and where she learns Bible stories and songs.

This church is helping Carol grow, but the most important influence on her life will be her loving parents (and I saw they are great parents when I babysat Carol and her sister Sarah two weeks ago). By helping Karen and David grow in their faith, we also help Carol.

Let's continue the growth.

Prayer

Dear God, we thank you for Karen and David's love for their children Carol and Sarah. We thank you for Terri, Jerel, Peggy, Carl, and all the other church members who help Carol grow. Will you please help this church, collectively and individually, to grow continually? Amen.