

What is church?

By [Diane Roth](#)

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Earlier this summer we held Vacation Bible School at our church. We had a morning program mostly for the children at our preschool, a few of their older sisters and brothers, and a few of our congregation's children as well.

But this year, we added something new: we offered two family evenings where we ate supper, learned to pray and share together, sang some Bible songs, and did some crafts. The theme of the week was "Jesus is the Light of the World," so some creative church members had created a scary cave that the children could walk through (but they had to do it with their parents). There were glow-in-the-dark necklaces and candles to carry. The children made pillowcases with a Bible verse. They made glow-in-the-dark bracelets. We sang "This Little Light of Mine" and a jazzed-up version of "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" and learned some sign language.

Both nights were wildly successful. The first night we had 83 people. The second night was not as large, but we had so many opportunities to get to know each other that evening. Everyone had fun both nights.

We invited them to come to church on Sunday and sing a couple of their Bible songs.

We had no idea what would happen, but we were excited.

On Sunday, only the families that were already members of our congregation came.

I have to admit, I was disappointed. I wondered what I could have done differently. I knew that many families are traveling on the weekends in the summer. But still, I had hoped that one or two could join us for church.

Then, the next day, I talked to our preschool director. She said something to me that made me think about the word *church*. It would have been nice if some of the families had come on Sunday, she said, but "what you did on Tuesday and Thursday night, *that* was church."

I thought about it. What did we do on Tuesday and Thursday? We ate. We prayed. We shared our highs and lows. We blessed each other. We prayed. We had fun. We sang songs about Jesus.

She was right. It was church. We were the church, worshiping together. What made us think it wasn't? It wasn't Sunday morning, and we weren't in the sanctuary, but it was church.

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I think this is one of the hardest things for us to get our brains around these days. What happens on Sunday in the sanctuary is important, but the sanctuary on Sunday morning is not the only church. Maybe it's not even the most important church. These days.

What is church?

Church is a holy gathering of people, and that was what was happening on Tuesday and Thursday evening, with parents and children and teenagers and grandmothers and grandfathers. We didn't go far, just across the parking lot, but it was church over at the school those nights.

We didn't go far, but it was a start, and I hope we go farther, a holy gathering of people, sharing the light, being the church.

*Originally posted at [Faith in Community](#)*