

Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. Ps. 68:5

Recently I came across my 6th grade class photo from Immanuel in Valpo, the same grade Stevie is in today here at St. Paul's. We were 41 students all in one classroom. I can't say there was never any chaos in the classroom, and I will plead the Fifth if pressed as to whether I contributed to that chaos. But we achieved a lot academically and excelled in many ways despite the crowding. It was a good year for me.

As I went through the photo remembering old names and faces I hadn't thought of in years, one thing that struck me was that nearly everyone in the class came from an old-school, 1950's-ish, traditional, intact family. I don't remember anyone in my class having a mom or a dad who had died. Nearly everyone went home from school to a waiting mom, some to do paper routes, other to play outside, and later sat down to dinner as a family after dad came home from work. That was just the norm.

That was 40 years ago. A lot has changed. They don't put 41 kids in a classroom anymore, I know that. More profoundly, though, what used to be considered a normal home and family is increasingly exceptional. There are many reasons for the changes. The need for two incomes has left homes bereft of homemakers ("Latchkey kids" used to be the popular sociological term for kids who were unsupervised at home after school while both parents worked). Divorce has obviously become far more common, as has single parenting. And here at St. Paul's for a variety of unrelated reasons, we have a tremendous number of students with parents who have died.

When I look at our students today I see many children struggling with big issues that would have been foreign to the 41 kids in my class photo. But that makes the idea of "church family" all the more important. God is the Father of the fatherless. I didn't know many, if any, fatherless kids when I was little. Motherless either, for that matter. But much has changed. God never promised that no child would ever lose a parent. But He did promise not to leave those children bereft. And He fulfills His promises in part through the church family.

When you see your church family gathered, remember that you are looking at people who have lost loved ones, at people who need help, at people who have suffered things you've never suffered or never had opportunities you've had. The kids leaving for Sunday school, the people chatting over coffee, the person meditating alone before worship—these are your family. They are your family because God is your Father and we are all His children, and the church is His holy habitation, the place where we are at home together.

In Christ, Pastor Speckhard