**Welcome Home**

Americans live in a restless society, ever on the move, but seldom finding a home. Among the many definitions of “home” found in *The American Heritage* *Dictionary*, I find the description of a place of safety, stability, shelter, and security. The dictionary also calls “home” a haven, a valued place, a dwelling place. I have found such a home at the Altoga Baptist Church.

Many predict the death of small-rural churches like Altoga, and, from one perspective, I understand the gloomy outlook for congregations who cannot “compete” with the elaborate activities and programs of larger churches. With that acknowledgment, I ask your consideration of one question. Does that flurry of activity mark the identity of a real church? Please consider the blessings of a small country church.

Family: Several members of our church have long-time family connection with this place and people. A good number of our folks have worshiped and served at Altoga throughout their entire adult lives. Others, though they may have left for a time, came home to the church of their childhood. For some folks, like my wife and me, Altoga has adopted us into their family. We have no generational attachment to the community; yet, the people here have made us feel like we’ve always belonged to this church. There’s something solid and enduring about a family church. If I still had children or teenagers at home, I would want them to see the legacy of family life fleshed out in the church.

Wisdom: I preach each Sunday to some folks in their senior years, including folks in their eighties and nineties, and often they become my teachers. Their rich life experience lends wisdom to all who worship with us. I work with young adults every day of my professional life, and one thing seems apparent to me. These young folks long for wisdom and insight, and there is no greater resource for wisdom than a church like Altoga.

Humility: The faithful members of this church know themselves to be sinners in need of the grace of the loving Lord Jesus. At best, we are sinners saved by grace, a living hope that Christ’s gracious work on the cross has made possible the forgiveness of our sins. You don’t have to be perfect to feel at home in this congregation; in fact, people impressed with their own righteousness would not feel at home. If, however, you need a church home that evidences merciful acceptance of all who need a Savior, then come join us in worship and service to the wonderful Savior.

Hospitality: I have never pastored a more kind, welcoming church than Altoga Baptist. You will feel at home the minute you walk in the door. The folks here will celebrate your attendance and adopt you into the family very quickly.

Opportunity: Are you looking for a place to really make a difference in the Kingdom of God, a place where your service really means something? If so, I encourage you to consider a country church. In the first few points of this little letter, I have emphasized the needs you may have, but, in all honesty, we need you too. Altoga needs committed Christians devoted to the service of Christ and the world. Your life can make a difference here.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus told a parable about a wayward, lost young man. This restless fellow demanded his portion of his father’s inheritance; then, with reckless abandon he squandered his fortune with careless living. He, of course, found his life ruined and destitute of anything meaningful. One day, as he fed another man’s pigs, he came to himself, resolving to return home. To his surprise, his gracious, forgiving father was waiting for him to return. The kind father warmly greeted his wayward son and quickly organized a festive celebration of his boy’s homecoming. The boy from the pig sty found himself forgiven, welcomed, clothed in the best apparel of his father’s household, and fed by the generous hand of one who loved him. What did the young man do to deserve all this blessed attention. Nothing! He just came home.

Welcome Home,

Sam Tullock

Pastor of Altoga Baptist Church