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commitment to be an active member in a local church family. It often is not easy, and at times may in fact be painful. This should not be surprising, as churches tend to act like families.

We are called to love and support one another. We are challenged to pray for each other, encourage each other, carry each other's burdens and in short, do life deeply together.

That is why so much of the New Testament was written with specific advice on how to "get along" within the family. So if the local church is a family, what kind of a family are we? We are a blended family. Think about the Brady's for a moment. You remember the Brady Bunch, the blending of a single dad with three boys and a single mom with three girls. Every week a new challenge was aired and resolved within half an hour. The lyrics to that sitcom theme song went like this:

*'Til the one day when
the lady met this fellow*

*And they knew that it
was much more than a hunch,*

*That this group would
somehow form a family.*

*That's the way we all
became the Brady Bunch.*

In real life, it takes a little longer than 30 minutes or even an hour each week to form a family from an unrelated group of people. It takes a deeper commitment than that, and it is not automatic.

As I see it, family bonding requires a series of deepening commitments,

What it Takes to be a Family

By Pastor Chuck Martin

THE SISTERS SLEDGE climbed the music charts in the 1980s with the hit song, "We Are Family." This quickly became their theme song, and pretty much is the only song of theirs that I remember. If the local church were looking for a theme song, we could do worse than "We Are Family."

In fact, family is my favorite description for the church found in the Bible. Paul refers to the church as a "family of believers" in Galatians 6:10: *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.* (TLB)

His unchanging plan has always been to

adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. — Ephesians 1:5 (CEV). When it comes to family planning, it is clear that from the beginning God has been planning a really big family.

The fact that we are adopted into God's family (the church universal) at the declaration of personal faith does not necessarily connect us to a local church family. In fact, a growing number of family members are disconnected from a local expression of God's family. They are living as "spiritual orphans."

There are many reasons for this, but the bottom line is that it takes personal

the first being to choose to belong, or join a local church family. Too often that is where the commitment ends. I see families and individuals join the church, attend on occasion, but never connect deeply or build relationships of substance.

In some churches, ours included, there is something called “non-resident members” which I have always found puzzling. How can you belong to a church family, and not even live in the area? What possible good is it to have your name on the roll of a church that you don’t even live near?

The second commitment is the commitment to connect on a deeper level. The early church described this family connection with a term translated as “fellowship.” The Greek word for fellowship, “koinonia,” comes from a root word that means common or shared.

To be a part of a local church family implies a connection that has deeper meaning and significance than occasional attendance. We are called to love and support one another. We are challenged to pray for each other, encourage each other, carry each other’s burdens, and in short, do life deeply together.

This sharing together should also deepen our commitment to love each other. Far from an emotion or feeling, love is a commitment to seek the best for each other. *“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.”*
– 1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)

When the church functions as a family, then single parents find support, children find surrogate grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. It is a beautiful thing to behold, yet does not occur without the commitment to belong, to connect and to love one another. When this happens, church gatherings become family reunions in which new members are welcomed, and where relationships are cherished and nurtured. When the church functions as a loving and healthy family, that is truly something to celebrate, and maybe even worthy of a song or two. We are family.

Chuck Martin is the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Frisco.



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