

## Ecclesia Clear Lake Elder Profile

Name: Abel Cass

1. How long have you been a part of the Ecclesia Clear Lake church family? What initially drew you to the community?

I first visited Ecclesia Clear Lake around 2007 or early 2008. My wife, Rhiana, and I began attending more regularly after we were married in July of 2008. While the participants, location, time and format for our ECL family have changed quite a lot over the last 15 years, what initially drew me in was how plainly and honestly the community explored and carried out our faith, and I still see that DNA expressed when we gather today.

2. In what ways do you currently serve in the church and in the community?

My family has recently been supporting me in taking on the challenge of serving as a high school assistant principal. While it is important, professionally, to avoid sharing my faith directly in this work, I am constantly praying for wisdom in decision-making, asking for guidance in how I can embody love that is so full of grace that it challenges the power dynamics that oppress students, families, and staff, and investing all I've been created and prepared to offer in service to that school community. I know I'm not the only one trying my best to live like Jesus where I work, and I know we don't always follow so closely in those footsteps. Sometimes we're together here, but your prayers, insights, music, and images are with me always, so I'm not sure where the edges of our church or community are.

3. Share an overview of your faith story.

I have been lost and found, like you. When I was eight I talked to a pastor about what I understood then about God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, professed my faith, and was baptized in a non-denominational church. I joined a southern baptist church my best friend's family attended in high school with a huge youth group and choir. That community led me to explore a vocational ministry calling at Baylor University through their ministry guidance program and, with the assistance of my mentor, decide there was a lack of clarity that I could wait on God to reveal while I pursued a new major in studio art. I met my future wife and

found my way into education through that major. Both of those discoveries have proven themselves full of blessing for me and my family, so I'm content to continue seeking and waiting for clarity. For now, I appreciate being sought out to serve as one of our elders as another opportunity to understand who I'm called to be.

4. At ECL we long to have deep roots in the historic Trinitarian Christian faith of the global church. Reflect on your understanding of the Trinity.

I think I understand it best when listening to the arrangement of notes into chords in a song, or as I understand colors to blend and harmonize on the surface of a painting. I read some science fiction recently (*The Three-Body Problem* by Cixin Liu) where I was introduced to what I think is a real concept in astrophysics describing the unpredictability of three objects moving only as a result of their mutual gravitational force. I understand the Trinity about that much, I think. I believe in the Father (Creator), Son (Savior), and Holy Spirit (Counselor), but I know I have to look past my interactions with other humans to understand what that means so my understanding of the nature of the Trinity isn't limited to my experiences with college roommates over who's doing what on the chore chart this week.

5. At ECL we long for deep bonds of connection in human relationships within our church and in our community. What is the role of authentic and healthy community in church and in faith formation?

In light of the previous question regarding the inherent sense of community within the Trinity, I am reminded of Nada Surf's (yes, of the 90's hit "Popular") album released on February 7th, 2020, just over a month before we went into quarantine, which contains the lyrics, "holy math says we're never not together". I think we don't choose to be in community, but it might just be part of how we are created in the image of God. We can't help it; we are never not together, so we might as well focus on the "authentic and healthy" parts.

That being said, I'm a homebody and an introvert with a job that is almost completely about collaborating with lots of people, so church community on a large scale hasn't always been authentic or healthy for me... but that has nothing to say about how much I value it. I can read about the sound of God walking in the garden (Genesis 3:8), or the rebuke of Jesus when the disciples were having a hard time staying alert while he prayed (Matthew 26:40), but that isn't how I get

to hear God now. I do often get to hear God through you, even more than I do when listening to some surf rockers.

6. At ECL we long to be actively engaged in matters of compassion and justice in our community and world. Why is this an important longing? What does a healthy posture of pursuing this longing look like in our context?

In a book I read a few years ago, *The Anatomy of Peace*, the case is made that the pursuit of justice is a compulsion for everyone, but how we accomplish justice differs. If I knock a hung painting askew, I'm compelled to "make it right", but for some reason I may choose to just tilt my head, turn away, or even knock other paintings askew rather than just admit to and correct the root problem. When we see someone hurting, we too often seek to balance the scales through excuses used like false weights. We might say, "My time is so scarce and fleeting that its value outweighs this situation," or, "I can tell by (fill in your favorite prejudice or bias here) they deserve some or all of this pain." If we keep being confronted by that hurting person, we may even go around drumming up support for our excuses until there's a whole system in place to act as an excuse itself. It's the pursuit of justice but twisted into something Jesus came to untwist for us.

I can't articulate a master plan for pursuing this longing in our context, for changing a system, removing bias, maintaining a healthier work/life balance, or even how to stop making excuses. Jesus did things like point out the obvious, ask simple questions, and refuse to join in when confronted with a twisted system (John 8). He invited *them* over, sat with *them*, and ate with *them* rather than spend his fleeting and valuable time with the elite (Matthew 9). I think we can do things like that.