

Ecclesia Clear Lake Elder Profile

Name: Valerie Hamilton

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

My husband, daughter, and I first visited Ecclesia about a year and a half ago. Having just moved to the Houston-area, we were eager to find community and were immediately struck by the welcoming environment at Ecclesia Clear Lake (ECL). After a long period of feeling disillusioned with church, I felt immediately accepted and was so encouraged by everyone who expressed interest in getting to know us. We have continued to be impressed by the love and acceptance we have experienced at ECL, and we plan to continue our commitment to the community. We look forward to continuing to learn from those around us and to growing together to better love God and those around us.

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

I currently help out in the Early Childhood Class at ECL.

3. Share an overview of your faith story.

I grew up in a Christian home, attending a traditional, conservative evangelical church. I was interested in God from a young age and, although I knew Jesus's message of forgiveness, sacrifice, and love, in practice God felt like a very powerful version of Santa Claus. I felt that he had a long list of expectations for me, and if I performed well enough, I would be rewarded and get to go to heaven (basically a souped-up version of Disney Land). If I didn't...well, I tried not to think about that. My efforts never felt good enough and I lived in a constant state of anxiety.

After graduating from college, I moved to South Korea and then Indonesia to work as an English teacher in Christian international schools. Later, after Kenny and I met and married, we moved to Germany, where I taught Bible and biblical language courses at a seminary for 5 years. During this time, my faith journey could be described as a roller coaster ride. I had some "mountaintop" moments, in which I felt I could see God orchestrating the events of my life and protecting me. But I also had many "valley" moments, in which I really struggled to see evidence for God.

There were three major crises that challenged and, ultimately, radically changed my faith: (1) a significant shift in how I understood the Bible, resulting from graduate and postgraduate biblical studies; (2) a long struggle with infertility and multiple miscarriages; and (3) serious, ongoing health challenges for our daughter, Autumn. The spiritual tension that accompanied these three crises caused my understanding of God to shift. I no longer understand God as a "fairy

godmother,” picking and choosing favors to grant, but I now view him in more transcendent way that leaves room for a lot of mystery. At the most basic level, God is love (1 John 4:7-8) and I want to be an expression of this redemptive, restorative love in the world. I see Jesus’s life of radical, self-giving love as the ideal model for living a meaningful life.

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.

The word that most defines the Trinity for me is mystery. I think the Trinity ultimately resists rational explanation but encourages us to look beyond simplistic understandings of God’s nature to embrace greater complexity. What I have appreciated most about the Trinity recently is how the different persons of the Trinity can resonate with us differently depending on our circumstances. I also think the Trinity as an image of diversity within God beautifully represents the diversity of the Christian community.

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?

I tend to be an individualistic person (shout out to Enneagram 3’s!) and I was raised in a church environment in which one’s “personal relationship with Jesus Christ” was strongly prioritized over more communal understandings of Christian faith. This very individualized model of faith was reinforced through my many years of studying the Bible academically: my faith became strongly connected to my ability to rationally interpret and explain biblical texts.

Fortunately, this tendency within myself was challenged as I learned about the priority of the community within the Bible’s historical context. This has been confirmed in my own experiences: many of the moments in which I was most aware of God were moments when other people showed love to me in unexpected ways. In an authentic and healthy community, I believe we can be inspired by one another and help each other live more like Jesus. I appreciate all the ways that I’ve experienced this so far at ECL!

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?

Compassion and justice have been defining features of God’s people from the beginning. Abraham’s call was never just about the people of Israel — the purpose of the Israelites being blessed was so they could, in turn, bless others (Gen 12:1–3). A primary criticism of many of the prophets was failure in the area of social justice — not caring for the poor and oppressed (Zech 7:9–10), unjust financial gain (Jer 8:10), and failure to address violence and oppression (Hab 2:12). This was a clear focus within Jesus’s ministry (Matt 25:31–46), as well as within Paul’s ministry, one example being his frequent mention of the collection for the poor in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:1–9:15; Rom 15:14–32).

In our own context, this will look differently for each person, but generally I believe it means pursuing health, wellbeing, and flourishing for those within our sphere of influence (and the openness to widen this sphere!). As a community, I believe we should be particularly concerned to address those issues of justice in which the church has failed in the past.