

I first wandered into Northridge in 1990 when the sanctuary was a little chapel with white pews and red everything else. I came looking for some comfort after a friend who was a longtime Northridge member died tragically in an automobile accident. I found not just comfort but wisdom in the words spoken by the pastor, Roger Quillin. One of the things that first struck me about Northridge was the number of congregants who grew up in the church and remained loyal members (can you raise your hand if you are one of those?)

Well, I am here this morning to tell you that I too grew up in this church. I came here as a 28-year-old without a clue about what being a church member really meant. That may surprise those of you who know that I am the daughter of a Baptist minister. But the truth is that growing up as Don Anderson's daughter only taught me half of what being a church member is all about. At Manor Baptist Church in San Antonio I was fortunate to learn how it felt to be loved, cared for, and treated as a special child of God (or a special child of Pastor Don Anderson - those roles sometimes merged in my brain). When I arrived at Northridge I was ready to receive all of those good feelings. What I did not yet understand was that life in a church family is richest when one is giving the most.

By watching you be a church, I learned how to be a servant rather than waiting to be served. Through you I learned that only by actively seeking ways to serve the church and church members could I truly experience the fullness of God's love and grace.

Here at Northridge I have had the opportunity to form relationships with people of all ages. I have watched children I taught as three-year-olds in Vacation Bible School find their way into the driver's seat of their parent's SUV. I have attended weddings of young adults who ate too much candy on youth mission trips. I have sat in memorial services for friends who taught me how to grow old. All of these relationships were built on the firm foundation of love for God and all humankind. Relationships built on the shared knowledge that to us who have been so fortunate, much service is expected.

Through these relationships, Northridge has taught me that it is possible for a large group of people who may display divergent political signs in their front yards to come together in worship, prayer, and community, knowing that we are all treasures in God's eyes. Here, in this place, we are reminded each week that it is not "us" and "them" but rather it is "All of God's children". So we listen to each other. Even if that makes for long committee meetings.

Northridge, thank you for your patience with me as I continue to grow up in this church. I love to tell the many stories of how your love and grace has carried me through the twists and turns that my life has taken. You helped me raise two compassionate daughters who remember and cherish the love they experienced at Northridge. You stood by me and trusted my decisions when I made changes in my family and lifestyle that would have given me an exit card in many Dallas churches. You have shown me God's love and grace over and over.

As I look into your faces, and as I remember many Northridge faces that I hold in my heart, I am reminded of a hand rhyme I learned back at Manor Baptist Church. "Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors and here's all the people".

All the people-

You, the dear people of my church family, have enriched my life immensely by sharing God's love and grace with me. I have received those "good feelings" I came looking for all those years ago. But these good feelings are not the kind that make me want to sit back and rest. These deep feelings of love & grace that you have poured into me and my family propel me to serve by sharing resources of money, time, and thought, so that the next 28-year-old, or 82-year-old, who wanders into NR looking for comfort might find just what I found. All of you – holding onto what is good, honoring ALL persons, loving and serving the Lord.