

BLESSINGS ALWAYS
September 1, 2020
Association Minister Message
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GATHERED. SCATTERED. “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.*” Matthew 18:20. There is not much gathering going on in church buildings these days. If in-person services are held, strict rules (hopefully) are being followed with disinfectant and social distancing a priority. We have missed being able to hug/brace/kiss/hold one another, poke at each other, even “get into one another’s face.” Fellowship is different as we *GATHER* around a screen or phone via an internet that does not interpret for us noticed expressions, feelings or body language.

This past week I “preached” at a church with two other people present in the sanctuary—a liturgist and a technician. I pictured worshippers I knew sitting in the pews and responding to the words spoken, music played, and prayers offered to God. The congregation was *SCATTERED* near and far via the internet, still a uniquely *GATHERED* faith community united in Christ.

Two or three (tens, hundreds, thousands) who gather in person or spiritually find Christ in their midst. A building does not make a church. It is the power of Christ in us—each one of us—whether *GATHERED* or *SCATTERED*—that we become the community of faith. As the Body of Christ, we are united in mission, ministries and service and we become the power of change, reconciliation and love in our communities and world.

When Christ is in the midst of us, our hearts, minds and spirits are opened to those have been excluded—*SCATTERED*—to treacherous, dangerous and unhealthy situations. The pandemic finds people dying alone, isolation away from family and friends, and uncertainty if it will ever end. Protests, unemployment, harassment, abuse, hunger, poverty and lawlessness have caused resentment, despair and human tragedy. Christ for us, in us, to others, together with others offers hope. To be *GATHERED* with Christ in our midst can bring about a community grounded in healing. *GATHERED* together with Christ, we are not alone and we share the burdens of the day with and for one another.

GATHERED builds a faith community near us and in the world with hope for God’s Shalom—God’s peace—God’s vision of embracing all persons as children of God. The words of a hymn remind us: “*We gather together to ask for God’s blessing, to live in community, seeking God’s will...Beside us, forgiving, enabling, sustaining, you call us, O Savior, to life that is new. You draw us away from self-centered complaining. You lead us and guide us in ways that are true.*” (NCH 421) *GATHERED*, though *SCATTERED*, God’s community is blessed to be blessings to one another. BLESSINGS ALWAYS.