

Dear Saints,

Each Sunday at 10 o'clock am the production team gathers prior to worship to figure out "who's on first." We go through the bulletin, check sound, and adjust as necessary so that we can create a virtual space for the Saints to gather in the beauty of holiness to worship God. There are often pre-worship hiccups. The production team smooths them out prior to worship, or not. We say "semper Gumby" and keep it moving with good humor, trusting foremost in God.

Many of us can recall fond memories of "going" to church. As a little girl going to church meant I saw uncles and aunts, cousins, and a host of friends each week. It meant memorizing scriptures with my grandparents. As I matured, it meant a deepening of my relationship with the Holy. As a pastor, it means serving God. It still means coming to worship to me. I miss gathering greatly. I know some of you by the sound of your footfalls. But life in a pandemic says we do not gather in our worship space yet.

Our inability to convene as we once did feels destabilizing. There is grief behind this because for now and into the not too distant future we will refrain from corporate worship in our church home. As we find our equilibrium, we also find that God has not left us. In fact, God, true to the promised Holy Spirit, has been with us the entire time.

Remember when Jesus had the conversation with the woman at the well? After discussing where God was to be worshipped, he told her that the hour is coming when we would worship God in spirit and truth. In other words, God cannot be fastened to locality, shrines, holy places or even our church building. God is and always will be unbound by pandemics and societal shifts. We are the ones called to worship in spirit and truth. By our baptisms, we are commissioned to participate in what our Jewish siblings call the "Tikkun Olam": to heal or repair the world.

Remembering its charter, the church has poured into the streets. It continues to feed hungry people, share the love of God, and proclaim justice for everyone. Our production team and every team of this church have had to be "semper Gumby." God is teaching us new ways of being church. In God's time, we will return to our church building and what a celebration that will be.

As you read this issue of the *Grapevine*, note all the creative ways that we are yet "Church" for each other and the sake of the world. Louise Lee and I are pandemic pen pals. She always ends each note with "Separately, together in Christ." Remember to wear your mask and wash your hands. Above all, remember that God means us well, even now.

Pastor Shannon ...