

From the Pastor's Pen

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It's great to be first, isn't it? We love to be first in line, first at the goal, first in a contest. If we hold to this notion, Vermont is indeed a winner. We are the winner (together with the state of New Hampshire) for being the least religious state in the union.

Yet I know that many Vermonters confess of a deep spirituality, not necessarily Christian.

My neighbor festoons her porch with Tibetan prayer flags. Another hosts yearly Beltane fires and yet another feels that Native American spirituality speaks to him. But none of them feel in the least inclined to visit a church, synagogue, Temple or anything associated with organized religion or even an organized group. They are individualists in their overall "Weltanschauung" (how they perceive the world), as well as in their spiritual expression.

The question then becomes "what does Christianity have to offer a world that does not see a need for it?" When we look to the past, we find that the church was at the core of the community. People met for worship, for fellowship, for church suppers and mission support events. In the early days the Church served as a hub – a meeting place for farmers who came from various directions and were able to share worship and spend time visiting with each other after church. Among other things, it served an individual families' need for connectedness with the community. Today our need for connectedness is filled in a myriad of ways through sports, clubs and social events.

Thus we need to ask ourselves: what is the function of the church in an age where many see no need for it?

I believe that the church needs to listen to those who are outside the church; listening to their stories of joy and sorrow, hope and despair. Only then can we proclaim to the world the age-old message that there is Good News for each person's life. That in Christ there is a new beginning when all is lost, that when we are at death's door we need not fear but can look forward to the promised life without tears, without decay and pain, living in the glory and presence of Christ. It is important to live out the love of God, which rescues us from loneliness and despair and gives us the gift of community.

"Feed my sheep," our Savior said to his disciples and that is what we are called to do. Feed them with the Good News of the Gospel, feed them with acceptance without stipulations, feed them with the bread of compassion, feed them by giving of ourselves.

When we live out these commands we are winners indeed.

Blessings, Peace and Joy,

Pastor Dagmar