

Commentary...

Longing for our eternal home

By Lisa May
Columnist

This is the second of two columns on the disruption of church services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a previous column, we looked at the definition and goals of the church in the New Testament.

In New Testament language, the church is not a building, but an assembly of people. Many of the goals of this assembly can be met in small groups, sometimes even more successfully than in a larger church gathering.

So why do we need church buildings at all? Can't we accomplish all the goals of gathering together through Zoom meetings and small groups? Although Jesus modeled small group ministry as He instructed the 12 disciples, He taught large assemblies as well. There is a very clear model for community in the Bible, with goals that cannot always be met unless a larger group is gathered in person. One such goal is to bear one another's burdens.

As Mikee Stutzman, Ministry Coordinator at Vast Church in Sisters, pointed out, "it's hard to share each other's burdens through a screen."

Gary Radmacher is an elder at Sisters Community Church (SCC). He is currently staying longer than expected for ministry in Africa due to travel restrictions initiated because of the pandemic (see related story, page 3). When asked about the negative impact of bans on church gatherings, Gary said, "Life is all about relationships, and since communication is essential to maintaining and growing relationships, and since the majority of communication is nonverbal, being in the physical presence of other people is a must for successful relationships to occur. So, what I've missed most is the face-to-face communication that I get to have with people in my church family."

Many members of the church have relationships that extend wider than the

small group setting can accommodate. Those wider church family relationships need time and care as well.

Sometimes those wider church relationships spur us to growth. Wendy Bachmeier, who handles publications and the online presence at SCC explained, "when interacting with other people I find out not everybody thinks the same thing I do or believes the same thing I do. Practicing forgiveness, repentance and grace is needed for us to grow as people, even when it's not easy. We can't really love to the full extent unless we're with other people and see God's love put in to action."

The church is also called to serve others. There have been many unique opportunities to serve the Sisters community during the pandemic and countless people, including those outside the church, have risen to the occasion. Bachmeier also has a role as emergency needs coordinator at SCC. She congratulated the community of Sisters saying, "neighbors are taking care of neighbors and looking in

on older folks. The church hasn't been needed as much as we thought we would be — the community is taking care of each other."

But some regular opportunities to serve have been shut down.

Andrew DeKeyser, a worship leader at Vast Church, explained that what he has missed in recent months is "different opportunities to serve, including leading worship."

Singing together in worship seems to be one of the things most missed by the church in Sisters. It is a supernatural event when God's people sing praises to His name in unison. One example of this is the Unity Service that has been coordinated by several churches in Sisters for the last several years, taking place in August on the ball fields at Sisters Middle School. Singing God's praise among the entire body of believers from all of time is promised for us in eternity. So it could be said that the longing to return to full-size worship gatherings is analogous to the longing for our eternal home.

Disruptions to normal



PHOTO BY LISA MAY

Vast Church continues to gather in smaller groups in backyards throughout Sisters.

routines can be used by God for His good purposes. Whether we continue to pause regular worship services, or even as we begin to

return to church buildings, let us all take this opportunity to refresh our thinking on God's goals for the church.

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SUDOKU SOLUTION

for puzzle on page 19

8	9	2	6	3	5	1	7	4
4	7	3	8	2	1	5	6	9
5	6	1	4	9	7	2	8	3
9	1	7	2	5	6	3	4	8
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2	3	5	9	4	8	6	1	7
3	5	4	1	8	9	7	2	6
1	8	6	3	7	2	4	9	5
7	2	9	5	6	4	8	3	1

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