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We Have Been Called Together

By The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

I lived in the greater Washington area a couple of times before moving to Alexandria. The first was when I was about a year out of college, and I took a position as a research assistant at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda. I had a house-full of roommates I was gradually getting to know but, really, I knew no one else in the area.

Like so many who have moved here before and since, I started to look for some sense of community. It wasn't long before I was visiting churches. One of those churches I visited frequently was led by our own Frank Wade, thus beginning a long association!

People welcomed me at church. I went to coffee hours. I joined the choir. I took a Bible class. A retired Congressman took me to the Capitol to see his former seat, to eat in the Members' Dining Room, and to sit in the Speaker's chair.

I befriended an elderly woman who lived alone and needed rides to church. I was around children and old people and young parents and other 20-somethings, all of us seeking to know more of God and to be in community with some like-minded people. Before long, I realized I started to feel more at home in the area. I knew I had a base, a safe place to return.

My experience was not unique. There is something about gathering with people who believe in a Higher Power, who think that our lives are not random, or haphazard, or devoid of meaning and purpose.

It is powerful to gather with folks who engage an ancient ritual that is still fresh and relevant, where sins are acknowledged, and forgiveness and a fresh start is grasped. It is so moving, in the context of the immense, overwhelming needs of this world, to try to make a difference while working with other committed people.

The weekly rhythm of church reminded me of the rhythm I knew so well in childhood, yet I was now seeking it out, rather than being forced to go by my parents. I found people with whom I could discuss some of the deepest questions. We engaged art, and music, and beauty. Of particular value, I was also encouraged to question, to poke, and prod, and learn more about the Anglican tradition.

I am remembering some of this history as I think about Immanuel. Clearly, this is a parish with a rich history of community and a deep heritage of folks together seeking God and God's will for them and our world. For example, I recently had the privilege of presiding at the wedding of a third generation Immanuelite. I also marvel regularly at contributions to our community made by newcomers who have only recently arrived with us.

This community we share has been tried, sorely, over the past year and a half. Yet I am so happy and blessed to tell you that it has held, better than I could have imagined, even during lockdowns, virtual services, drive-by greetings, and so much else.

We are approaching our annual Homecoming at Immanuel. It is a good time, a wonderful time, to renew and rekindle your association with this community, God's people, here at Immanuel. The old saying has it that "home is where they have to take you in when you show up."

Well, at Immanuel, the home we share is where we *WANT* to take you in when you show up! It is where your gifts, talents, questions, and passions are welcomed and respected by the greater whole. It is where there are opportunities to try out all sorts of ministries, even as we continue in this cursed pandemic, which we thought would be long over by now.

Clearly, the storm is not yet over. But in this community, we are reminded that God is in charge, and that we are blessed, equipped, encouraged, and provisioned to withstand it, together. We have had to adjust and pivot, and then adjust some more, and we will likely have to do yet more, but God is in control, and we have been called together.

I hope and pray that we will see each other and be together at Homecoming.

I am reminded of a beloved hymn we sing, “My Shepherd will Supply My Need” and especially the final stanza.

The sure provisions of my God
attend me all my days;
O may thy house be mine abode,
and all my work be praise.
There would I find a settled rest,
while others go and come;
no more a stranger or a guest,
but like a child at home.

As you listen to this [hymn](#), I hope you will reflect on the power of your home at Immanuel.