

## What is the Church?

*Reflection from the Conference Minister from May 20, 2020 Coconut Wireless*

As we near the end of May, we do so with an extension of sheltering-in-place. This strategy has worked well to dramatically flatten the curve in Hawai'i and reduce the projected mortality rate. I find myself thankful for our state and county political leaders and the decisions they are making. However, as we continue to love our communities by remaining at home, there are calls from church leaders and pastors to "open up the church." I admit that I find these calls based more on the impatient ego needs of preachers than I find them based on solid faith principles.

First, the call to "open up the church" assumes the church has been closed, as if the church can be reduced to the facility in which we meet. Faith teaches us that the church is the people and the work of the church takes place in the community. As the famous benediction goes, "The worship has ended, go forth and do the work of God."

Second, for the Christian, the sanctuary has never been the building; it is the condition of our heart. Paul the Apostle wrote to the church in Corinth, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16) God does not dwell in a building; God dwells in the hearts of those who follow God's ways.

In the Christian faith tradition God has never been relegated to a building. Indeed, the early Christians met in private homes, in outdoor settings and, when arrested, in jails. They did so because they understood a human-constructed building could never be the residence for the transcendent God.

Yes, we do miss seeing our family in the faith, but let us be patient in our present situation. We will get through this together because we are in God's hands. And because we are in God's hands, we will be changed. May God change our understanding of who the church is.

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