

BLESSINGS ALWAYS

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Association Minister Message

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INCLUSION. “The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the gentiles...” (Acts 10:45). It is often difficult to open our lives (and the church) to those who are strangers, look different than us, and have opinions that might cause our comfort zones to be challenged. “Birds of a feather flock together” is an English proverb which indicates we are most comfortable with those who have same interests, personalities, characters, and faith understandings. There are many scriptural passages that give advice to welcome strangers seeking refuge in our faith communities. As a nation, there is a national debate about who is welcome into our country, forgetting that our ancestors were strangers who often were treated unfairly and told to go back home.

The early church struggled with the same issue, “astounded” that “even the gentiles” received God’s Holy Spirit as God’s beloved. It was when Christ-followers became Holy Spirit messengers, the church multiplied and spread a message of resurrection throughout the world. It was when the church focused on Jesus Christ that the power of *INCLUSION* brought about missions and ministries that changed, welcomed, and affirmed people of diversity into their faith community.

So often the Christian Church is described as family, beloved community, and community of faith for everyone. When we exclude certain people, we limit God’s amazing grace. It should not be our decision who is in or who is out, for it is God’s love that welcomes all, for all are created in God’s image. Those who follow Jesus are to “love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12). It is respecting one another even when pain is trying to tear a relationship apart. God created us with a diversity of gifts and graces that are blended to be the Body of Christ TOGETHER. This diversity proclaims a message of relationships, reconciliation, and restoration. *EVEN* we, who are strangers, are welcomed and *INCLUDED* as *FRIENDS* with love for one another. No longer strangers, we will have a renewed sense of unlimited possibilities for God’s future in and through us. *BLESSINGS ALWAYS.*