

## **HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/12/2023**

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

A number of different sources are reporting on a new sort of pandemic that is occurring in our country today. This situation pre-existed the COVID pandemic, but now, in part because of the COVID pandemic, it has grown to extreme proportions. This “pandemic” is loneliness.

Though there certainly were many cases of loneliness in the United States prior to COVID, sociologists, psychologists, and other professionals are recognizing the massive number of people who are experiencing loneliness today. One of the greatest contributing factors to this increase is the tendency of people to still feel the need to avoid each other, having been conditioned to do so because of the pandemic. Others have simply gotten into the habit of not going to the places or joining with groups as they did before March of 2019.

We have seen the evidence of this in worship attendance in our church. In fact, most churches today are reporting a one-third to one-half loss of worshipers since the pandemic began. But the primary concern should not be the decline of people in church. Rather, our concern should be how many people have lost the social benefits of being involved with a loving community of believers. Among those who are experiencing loneliness today are those who no longer gather with friends of the same faith and join in the activities of the church that bring joy and meaning to life.

This means that we have a tremendous opportunity to address a great need in our community. Those who continue to come on Sundays for worship and get together with other believers in the settings that the church offers beyond Sunday morning services know how much value they find in these occasions. Yet those who have stopped attending may not connect their feelings of isolation with their lack of involvement in the church.

As our LORD has called us to minister to those in need, it is important that we recognize among those to whom we are sent are those who are experiencing loneliness. And not just those who used to come to church. There are many others who were not involved in church who also suffer from isolation. We can offer to them a place that we know will help to free them from the burden of feeling lonely. We can tell them of what we’ve found in our faith home. We can bring them to meet others in the safety of the congregation and, in the process, help to draw them out of their loneliness. Consider the people you know. Listen for comments from them that indicate their sense of isolation and then starting with yourself, take time to share with them the blessings of gathering with others. Let this be a way to bring others into or back to a relationship with the LORD that can lift them from the depths of isolation into the joy of community in CHRIST.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey