

What is a congregation for?

By [Diane Roth](#)

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On Saturday, a young man from my congregation died, after a long battle with cancer. Well, I say he was a young man, but he was my age. Yes, he was young.

He and his wife were regular worshippers at our early service. They loved the traditional liturgy, and although they are quiet people, they attended one of our couple's groups, and were well known in our congregation.

When I announced his death yesterday at church, I thought I heard sighs too deep for words.

His wife came to church yesterday, finding comfort not only in the music and the liturgy and the prayers, but in the congregation who surrounded her with words of grief and truth and hope.

This is what a congregation is for.

Nor all people are so connected to one another in a congregation, of course. I used to be judgmental and think that perhaps they thought of a church as a sort of Big Box Religion store, where they would go to get the Spiritual services they needed, when they needed them. Perhaps I thought this way because I grew up in a smaller congregation. But I think that in a bigger congregation, it's inevitable that not everyone will experience the same level of connection with one another. But they'll be there for a Sunday School class, for the camaraderie of a youth group experience.

This is what a congregation is for.

And then there is the time when the worship service ends, and everyone goes out: leaves the building, disperses. They go to families and communities and work. They go to be larger than themselves, to bear witness to something more loving and more gracious than themselves. We gather to encourage one another and bind up each other wounds, but when we go, we go to love the world, and apply God's healing.

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