

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

—Matthew 18:20

FRIDAY, MARCH 10

As the daughter of a United Church of Christ pastor, I grew up with 250 sets of eyes watching my every triumph and misstep. I didn't want to rebel against God or my parents, but I did want to forge my own identity. Each time I stumbled, I felt like I was letting down my family and my church. Only after I left home and discovered the joy of choosing to seek God did my church community truly become my family. Through working with my church and Episcopal Relief & Development, I have traveled to Israel, Palestine, Myanmar and Cuba. In each place, I discovered the people I met were my family too. I have seen the work being done to overcome poverty, adversity and injustice. I have left these places saying joyfully, "Yes, we can!"

When I was invited to speak at the 150th anniversary of my childhood church, the faces I saw were no longer of my father's church, but rather the faces of my family who nurtured and loved me in spite of my stumbles.

During this time of spiritual introspection and renewal, I invite you to explore how we can reach out to the world – our family. Together, we are stronger, more resilient and able to create positive change. Together, we can help heal a hurting world.

—Sharon Hilpert