Without a doubt, the lead-in to Pentecost 2020 has been unlike anything we have experienced in our lifetime. The country is beginning to emerge from the ravages of pandemic, yet life continues interrupted and disrupted by closed schools, closed businesses, closed government services, and yes, closed churches. Life redefined by a new normal that includes the omnipresence of masks, gloves and hand sanitizer. Individuals and family units slowly emerging from confinement, sheltering, quarantine.

After Chicago schools closed down in mid-March, a natural division of duties arose at our daughter Christine’s house as two parents and two teen-age daughters learned to work, study, and play together full time.

Christine remains the champion of meal planning and preparation, but now everyone lends a hand. They all learned to use more direct communication to schedule doing laundry, addressing grocery needs, carrying out housekeeping chores, and pet-care responsibilities. As individuals they shoulder their duties as household manager, students and primary bread winner. And as a family, they continue to develop an appreciation of each other's gifts for morale boosting, understanding, and organization. And, no surprise, many thousands of households are in the same boat.

We too, as the people of St. Lawrence, have been forced to experiment and adjust to a new and very different set of circumstances. At our church, as worship space was rendered off limits, we’ve learned to adapt ministry of proclamation and presence to phone, Zoom and Google Drive. We developed, and continue to develop, our skills for the use of technology in ways we would have considered unimaginable or perhaps irrelevant before. We’ve become public videographers, contributing to worship with stories and snippets captured on laptops, tablets and smartphones. Holy Week worship would have been a far different experience had it not been for the coming together of those talents. And let’s not forget what a thing called Zoom has meant to these subsequent Sundays of shared worship.

Our experience is far from unique. We know that the same is happening in so many, many church communities – and their stories are inspiring. Besides the talents employed in conducting worship remotely, individual gifts have come into focus as church directories get divided up and phone contacts made with each household – as church leaders learn to lead in new ways. Where there are needs, healthy and able people volunteer to run errands for those whose health demands a more rigorous form of self-isolation. Where there are losses, gifts of compassion are shared in new forms. Where there is anxiety, friends deliver gifts of memes or handwritten notes or surprise packages of necessities.

Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul describes manifestations of the Spirit as capabilities seen in individuals, gifts for leadership and service. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” he writes.

It is crucial to note that the scripture says “each,” not “some,” and recent months have illustrated how true this is. Paul names wisdom, knowledge, faith, and healing, among others. We might celebrate gifts for offering comfort, or explaining new guidelines and recommendations, or displaying ease with technology alongside the more traditional gifts that enable us to achieve understanding and make meaning.

In the Corinthians’ time and in ours, each one’s gifts are useful for the whole community. Regardless of how we gather for Pentecost this year, it feels like a fitting time to acknowledge the varieties of surprising gifts we have discovered—especially those capabilities we did not realize we needed in order to flourish as the Body of Christ.

For all this and more, Pentecost is all the more an occasion for rejoicing in the midst of hardship and uncertainty. Pentecost is about the miracle of community, the community across differences that is made possible through the work of the Spirit, and what we hold as sacred within our community: our togetherness, our unbreakable bond of living with and loving each other, and through displaying who we truly are through the gifts of faith and service.

As theologian Willie Jennings suggests in his commentary on Acts, this event of Pentecost is purely an act of the Spirit. It is a work that proceeds out of being open to the transformative power of divine love.

The joy of Pentecost is that it gives us a vision and hope for a community made possible through the work of the Spirit.

Yet, even after carefully considering our gifts and talents, there may be times we think of ourselves as quite ordinary. We may be tempted to defer to those who are purported to have expert knowledge and special skills. Just remember, the Spirit has been poured out upon all of us. The Spirit has given each of us gifts to be shared among us for the common good. As long as we hear the voices of those whose perspectives, knowledge, life experiences, skills, and gifts are different from our own, as long as we don’t try to be the same as one another, there is a good chance that the Spirit will be working among us.

We don’t have to be extraordinary; we don’t have to be like one another; we do have to live together, listen to one another, love each other. And when we do, with the Spirit’s help, the church, made up of God’s people, will continue to meet life’s challenges and make a difference in the world around us.

Amen.