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Several years ago, I received a message from Doug Cripe, asking to be my Facebook friend. He wrote that he was forming a group of Doug Cripes, with members from all over the world. I joined the group, and now we hear about each other's lives and send birthday greetings to one another. We've formed our own virtual community of guys with the same first and last name.

Paul O'Sullivan formed a similar group, and he discovered three other guys with his same name, and interestingly, they all had a common love for music. They lived far apart from one another, from Pennsylvania to England, from Maryland to the Netherlands.

During the COVID lockdown last year they discovered they had more unscheduled time, so they didn't let their geographic spread keep them from doing something musical—they formed a band, called the Paul O'Sullivan Band, with guitar and vocals, bass and percussion. They recorded their parts separately, then through the wonders of computer technology, they blended their music together.

The Paul from Pennsylvania said, "So many doors had closed because of covid, and yet, Baltimore Paul had already opened this door for us [by creating the Facebook group], so it was so easy to walk through. From that, we sort of developed our ethos, which is: 'If it makes you smile, lean into it; if it makes you dance, embrace it; and if it does both, it's the Paul O'Sullivan Band.'"¹

The writer of Genesis, the first book in the Bible, had no understanding of a virtual band, and yet, the writer had something in common with the virtual groups today. In the story, after God created the first human, God said, "It's not good that the human is alone. I will make him a helper that is perfect for him" (Genesis 2:18, CEB). The writer of Genesis, as well as the members of the virtual band, knew that humans need one another, need a community of belonging, that it's not good for humans to be alone.

God created many animals, according to Genesis, but none of them seemed the right match for the first human, so God created another human. In Hebrew, the word used for the man is **אִישׁ** (is) and the word

for woman is **אִשָּׁה** (issa), with the words sounding

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very much alike. They sound like they go together, suggesting the interrelatedness of humans. We humans are made to be together, to form community.

As the Paul from England explained about their virtual Facebook community, “There is something very difficult to put your finger on about the friendship that you develop with people that you share the same name with. I never thought it was a thing, but indeed, it is a very nice thing.”

Not only is sharing a name something that can tie people together, but so is creating music. During the pandemic, when I was home a lot more, I thought I would spend more time practicing my instruments, but I discovered something interesting—even though I had the time, I did not have the community, for during COVID, we could not rehearse together. There’s something about making music with others that’s just not the same as playing an instrument alone.

Actor Ian McKellen discovered a similar feeling while playing the part of Gandalf in the movie “The Hobbit.” There’s a scene where the larger Gandalf is

eating with the smaller hobbits, and in order to create the scene, they had two sets—a larger one for him and a smaller one for the hobbits. These two videos were later merged into one scene, giving the impression of Gandalf dining with the smaller hobbits.

The technical aspects worked out just fine, but there was an unexpected human element that caused some difficulty. During the filming, the veteran actor — who had faced all sorts of theatrical challenges in his long career — suddenly broke down weeping. The unexpected feeling of isolation and loneliness, in a scene that was supposed to be boisterous and merry, overwhelmed him to the point that he could hardly continue.<sup>2</sup>

I began to sense that feeling within our church as well, for even though we could have church virtually, it wasn’t the same as being together live in one place. Even now, with our smaller gatherings on Sunday mornings, it just doesn’t feel the same, does it? There’s something about being in this place that creates a deeper sense of connectedness.

A recent article in the *Christian Century* envisions the role of the church after the pandemic:

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Thirst will increase for authentic community where moral formation and relationships of meaning can prosper. In social isolation, we have learned the truth of [theologian] Frederick Buechner's words: "You can survive on your own; you can grow strong on your own; you can prevail on your own; but you cannot become human on your own."<sup>3</sup>

That's something congregations have been doing for thousands of years—providing community to realize our humanness. A place to make mistakes and experience forgiveness. A place to hear that we're not alone. A place to hear the stories of what God has been doing and is still doing in the world. A place to hear that new life is possible, not just after we die, but here and now. When life falls apart and brokenness surrounds us, we can hear the good news that new possibilities do exist, that new life can happen in this life.

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney Page, "Paul O'Sullivan found people with his name on Facebook. Naturally, they formed a band," January 25, 2021, [www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/01/19/paul-osullivan-band-name-facebook/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/01/19/paul-osullivan-band-name-facebook/)

<sup>2</sup> *Homiletics*, October 3, 2021.

This week we also celebrate World Communion Sunday, where churches from around the globe join together in having communion, whether they do it regularly once a quarter, once a month, or every Sunday. Today we all join together, for we remember we are a larger community than one congregation or one denomination. Even those of us in smaller congregations can celebrate that we are part of something bigger, than we are part of a larger family. Together, we remember we are all humans, sustained by God's presence in our lives. Whether you play an instrument and join a band, join a virtual community with others who have your same name, or break bread at this Table, you are part of a larger family, a human family, that God cherishes and loves at each moment.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter W. Marty, "Six predictions for the post-pandemic church," March 10, 2021, [www.christiancentury.org/article/editorpublisher/six-predictions-post-pandemic-church](http://www.christiancentury.org/article/editorpublisher/six-predictions-post-pandemic-church)