



First and Center
Pastor's Blog
February 20, 2019

Last December, our church staff and some lay leaders, along with folk from Immanuel and Asylum Hill Churches, hosted a Hartford police officer who led us through a training of what to do if we have an active shooter in our buildings. This weekend, I will go through training in what to do if someone

overdoses in my presence and how to use the medication Narcan.

Nearly 37 years ago when I graduated from Seminary, it never occurred to me that I would write a paragraph like that.

I serve a church in the middle of the city, and all this is very real for us; it is also real for churches in the suburbs and rural parts of this country, as we discover if we listen to the news.

All around us in the city are also empty church buildings, congregations which have dissolved or become part of other churches. Worship attendance and church membership are very low almost everywhere in almost every kind of church.

How do these facts relate? I am not saying that lack of religion is causing mass shootings and the spike in drug addiction. It's not that simple, and those things have been around for a long time.

What I am saying, though, is that this is a time for the churches to rise up and invite the world back into our midst as a place for the practice of love, the incubator of hope, and the provider of healing for the sick and food for the hungry. That's how Jesus got us started. And that's what we need to claim as our mission more strongly now than ever. How can we re-shape our faith communities with this as priority for our lives? How can we use our buildings and money to serve the mission, rather than the buildings and money **being** the mission?

The world needs us and the message of love beyond boundaries, mercy beyond deserving, and hope in something greater than what we can see, or buy, today. Is that what people see and hear when they walk through our doors or encounter us in our daily walks?

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Transitional Minister