

## **COME AS YOU ARE**

**by Debra Elramey**

Drive north down Highway 301, past the school where, weekdays, deaf children run wild on the playground. Keep going until you see the sign, “Snake Man,” then turn left into Camper’s Lodge and swing on around past the turquoise pool in front of the laundromat and park your car. Get out and go inside – any wayfaring stranger is welcome here of a Sunday morning, rain or shine. Take a seat in one of the six pews painted white as the washers and dryers lined up in the back of the room.

If it’s winter when you arrive, I’d advise you to bundle up in layers, and don’t forget your thick socks, gloves, and lug-sole boots. The cold north wind creeps through these cinderblock walls like pneumonia into lungs. Soon you’ll meet the “Preacher Lady” and members of her flock, the Snake Man included, and sister Kim, newlywed, along with her husband, Blinky. Don’t worry if you’ve been drinking, just leave your bottle outside for the time being. You never know, this could be your lucky day.

If the weather is warm, short sleeves are fine. No need to hide the craters on your arms. To these folks, needle marks are common as acne on a teen, or tractors on a farm. You won’t hear any Trinity chimes or sing the usual hymns, recite the Apostle’s Creed, drop a check in the offering. Just come as you are. You have nothing to fear, nothing to dread. There is no religion here, but for the laying on of hands and the resurrection of the dead.