



The Peace of Christ Be With You!

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I left the church meeting in tears. We had set aside time on a Saturday for the worship planning team to prepare for the church season. This was not a meeting around a conference room table, but a hands-on, crafting meeting. Using construction paper, tubes, rattles, rocks, bowls, glitter, and sundry materials, we hoped to redesign our fellowship space into a sacred space for prayer during the season.

Did I mention that I'm not particularly skilled in crafts? I could imagine what we hoped to create, but my fingers were sloppy with glitter and glue. It seemed that everything I tried became a mess. Our leader grew increasingly short and frustrated with me. What had promised to be an enjoyable day left me embarrassed and hurt.

The following morning during worship, we were invited to pass the peace as was our custom. Before I could extend my hand to the person next to me, the leader from the prior day's meeting made a direct beeline for me. With tears in her eyes, she told me how sorry she was, and we shared a hug. It was the most meaningful passing of the peace I'd ever experienced.

In that space of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, I came to understand the power of Christ's peace. *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."* (John 14:27-28 NRSV).

Our Presbytery Gathering Planning Team and Council have approved a "Reconciliation" theme for our 2019 Presbytery Gatherings. In February, we will explore the theological underpinnings for reconciliation, led by David Sawyer and Deborah Fortel of Flourishing Church Consulting and Coaching in Louisville, Kentucky. We will then go in depth into areas where we have need to repent, seek forgiveness, and pray for reconciliation. Dr. DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*, will facilitate our conversation around racial reconciliation in May, and, in September, Dr. Bettina Love, author of *We Want to Do More than Survive*, will give a specific example of our intergenerational divide through her work on educational reform, particularly for children of color. Our last Gathering in November will give us a chance to explore together the other ways in which we divide ourselves: big church – small church; urban church – rural church.

Over the course of the year, I pray that we will think of those areas of our lives in which reconciliation is badly needed. Perhaps it will start with Sunday morning. Sometimes our greatest wounds are inflicted by other Christians. Are there people you avoid during the passing of the peace? People whom you no longer trust? Instead, consider seeking them out. Too often, I fear, we use that time to say "hello" or "good morning" to the "safe" people next to whom we've chosen to sit. Returning to the original purpose of this act, can we instead offer words like, "the peace of Christ"? We could intentionally find the person with whom we've had a bad relationship and extend the peace of Christ. It's only a start, but it's a step we need to take before we go further. Practice this week, and let me know how it goes!