



## The Hard Work of Reconciliation

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“Pray for someone you don’t like.” Really? Must I? We were urged to pray silently for the person’s happiness, health, freedom from suffering, and peace.

It was hard. I found myself lapsing into snarkiness: “I pray for your happiness, because clearly you are not a happy person. No happy person could be so mean.” Then, I moved to the next prayer for health, “I pray for your health and wholeness, because you are a very sick person in need of professional help...” Ah, yes, it was hard to offer a prayer of genuine compassion.

At last night’s Presbytery Gathering, we began our deep dive into the year’s theme of Reconciliation. Our education hour, business meeting, and worship were infused with the elements of reconciliation: an acknowledgement of the harm we’ve caused, the need for repentance, the hope for forgiveness, and ultimately a restoration of unity. We reminded ourselves, however, that we must do a lot of internal and collective work before we can move toward the goal of restoration.

Angela Ogelsby, our Synod Commissioner and soon-to-be Moderator of the entire Synod of Lakes & Prairies, spoke passionately of her recent trip to Montgomery, Alabama, with other synod executives from the denomination. They confronted not just our past history of racism, but the real, ongoing systemic racism that pervades the very air we breathe. She asked us whether we would be a church that merely gives money to support anti-racism causes, or whether we would put our boots on the ground to act against racial injustice. As our upcoming Synod Moderator, she will be a strong leader for how we must actively engage this issue – one that divides us deeply in this country.

I also invited congregations to work together between Presbytery Gatherings around the theme of reconciliation. [This list](#) offers suggestions for ways that we can engage the theme in our own neighborhoods and beyond, through worship, advocacy, study, and participation in the community. Thanks to the generous mission support from our congregations each year and a grant for congregational vitality from the Presbyterian Mission Agency, we are able to underwrite a portion of the costs for such activity – if two or more Presbyterian congregations come together for these activities.

The divisions in our country, communities, churches, and families run too deep for everyone to try to “go it alone.” When we come together, we have added joy, energy, and resources to tackle these societal issues. One of the blessings of our denomination is our connectedness. We are indeed better together. So, I encourage you to look at the list of activities or invent your own. Reach out to other congregations in the Presbytery about doing something – even just one project – this year. If you haven’t found a partner, let me know, and we’ll help to match you.

Then, let us know what you’re doing and learning. We’ll find inspiration and hope in our collective work.

In the meanwhile, we are invited to continue the practice of praying for each other that we might be reconciled one to the other – particularly those people you don’t like. If we can practice with each other genuinely (and not the way I first tried it), then perhaps God will find us to be useful tools in God’s mission to our communities and the world. If we can’t overcome our own divisions and brokenness, then we will face the reality that we might talk a good game, but we are not prepared to truly serve Christ, whose reconciling ministry we profess.