



Sheep & Goats

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Rachel Yates

We can tell a lot about our priorities by what makes us sleepless or what occupies our thinking. In the Presbytery, I am humbled by your attention to things that matter: suicide prevention, affordable housing, healthcare advocacy, earth protection, and so much more. You worry about people and, as Christians, you feel called to act on their behalf. Sometimes that action comes through immediate relief or aid. Other times, you work at a developmental level to change people's circumstances or you advocate for system-wide change.

This is what separates the sheep from the goats. Even though they look adorable in pajamas, trust me, you don't want to be a goat. Starting at Matthew 25:31, we read of two distinct groups: those who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited those in prison, and those who did not. Failing to recognize Christ in "the least of these," those who did not express these outward signs of compassion – the goats -- were doomed to eternal punishment. We are left to question whether we will be sheep or goats – whether we will reach out to love our neighbor or not.



The Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) is inviting congregations to claim their "sheep-ish" identity as a Matthew 25 church. The PMA urges us to show love for God and our neighbors by embracing *one or more of three focus areas*:

- **[Building congregational vitality](#)** by challenging people and congregations to deepen their faith and get actively and joyfully engaged with their community and the world.
- **[Dismantling structural racism](#)** by advocating and acting to break down the systems, practices and thinking that underlie discrimination, bias, prejudice and oppression of people of color.
- **[Eradicating systemic poverty](#)** by working to change laws, policies, plans and structures in our society that perpetuate economic exploitation of people who are poor.

The PMA encourages each congregation, through its session, to commit to becoming a Matthew 25 church and to make an [online pledge](#). You'll get stickers and stuff in the mail, along with helpful online resources. You're also encouraged to share stories of how you live into being a Matthew 25 church, so others can be encouraged and connected.

Based on what I've come to love about you, our congregations are ready to sign on. Many of you already care for those living in poverty through food aid and shelter. Your gifts of laundromat services or clothing restore dignity. Similarly, many of you recognize the racial division in our state and our country. Through local initiatives and our Presbytery Gatherings, you are taking steps to dismantle structural racism. Nearly ¼ of our churches committed to the small church vitality program. Others are using Holy Cow assessments to help their congregations be vital. You're ready!

Though you can be a Matthew 25 church without doing anything differently, accepting this invitation can take us deeper into each topic to wrestle with the intersections of poverty, racism, and yes, our own congregational struggles. In *Piloting Church: Helping Your Congregation Take Flight*, Cameron Trimble explains these intersections in a practical and humbling way: "If we are going to obsess about Sunday attendance and giving (institutional maintenance), we should also obsess about graduation rates, employment rates, and crime rates (community transformation)." (p. 9). Our "success" as a church cannot come in isolation from the realities of our communities. In this PMA initiative, we don't adopt a new program; we claim an identity that prioritizes all that we do and proclaim as the church.