



My Apologies

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Does anyone else remember the cute little cartoons by Kim Casali that always started with the line, “Love is...” One of the more famous lines was, “Love is...never having to say you’re sorry.” It always struck me as odd. I’d been taught to apologize when I’d hurt someone. To be fair, the cartoon didn’t say, “Love is...never saying sorry,” but rather never *having to say* we’re sorry. Still, it seemed unlikely that we would never make a misstep meriting an apology. By nature, we are flawed; our relationships are imperfect; we make mistakes, and we hurt each other.

The practice of apologizing has fallen out of vogue. Too often, the offender doubles down on a mistake, growing defensive or blaming the other. Maybe it’s because we’ve developed a culture of recording others’ mistakes to shame them on social media. While such recordings have powerfully brought to light abuses that need to be corrected or condemned, public shaming for every infraction might not create the most conducive environment for voluntary, heartfelt repentance.

As Christians, we recognize that our salvation is built on grace and forgiveness we can never earn. We take time in worship to confess our sins, not just individually but corporately. We confess as a body, as the Church. During worship, have you ever read in unison a portion of a Prayer of Confession and thought in that fleeting moment, “Well, that doesn’t apply to me...” Nonetheless we read it together, confessing together, even if individually we haven’t engaged in the wrong behavior, at least not recently. When we confess as the Church, we speak for Christians of all times and places. We acknowledge the hurt caused by the Church, and we repent by turning back toward God, so that the Church will not continue wounding others or offending God.

For that reason, the Church publicly apologizes for errors committed by our ancestors. Several years ago, the Presbyterian Church (USA) apologized to Indigenous tribal leaders for the ways the Church tried to erase Native culture in forced boarding schools, took land belonging to their Nations, and devalued Indigenous Peoples. Some might claim, “I didn’t do that. I wasn’t even born when that happened.” But that defense disregards the corporate, timeless nature of our confession as the Church. It also disregards our individual responsibility for harms that continue to occur because of systems and structures that perpetuate racism.

On August 23, from 3-4:30 pm, the Church has another opportunity to offer its corporate apology. The [Day of Repentance](#) is a locally organized event in which the Presbytery of Milwaukee is partnering, allowing us to acknowledge the sin of racism against Black People and to join with ecumenical partners and leaders of other Christian churches to corporately and individually recognize the ways in which we have wounded people God loves. With social distancing at Wisconsin State Fairgrounds, the event will feature prayer, live music, truth-telling by those harmed by the Church’s racism, education on the historical role of the White Church, and a time for repentance. An online option will also be offered. We encourage you to [pledge](#) to study, pray, and act. The Day of Repentance allows us to join with ecumenical partners and with leaders of other Christian churches to corporately and individually recognize the ways in which we have wounded the people God loves.

As part of our litany of repentance, we will be asked to acknowledge, “We recognize that confessions are empty promises without meaningful actions—actions that are grounded in prayer, education, and soul-searching repentance.” This day does not check off the box of anti-racism, so that we can move on to other things. It is only a start the moves us to action, but repentance is a good place to start.