



## Genuine Love

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You might still be able to picture the cartoon panel of Lucy, skipping rope while taunting Linus. He'd revealed to Lucy his aspirational profession: a doctor. A noble profession indeed! A calling to care for others, sometimes at risk of one's own health. Doctors see us at our worst; they walk with us through stages of life that bring anxiety. Even when hospital resources are stretched thin and wait times extend into hours, we trust that healthcare professionals have our best interests at heart. Without missing a skip, however, Lucy crushed Linus' dream. He could never be a doctor, she objected, because he didn't love mankind. Those of you steeped in *Peanuts*' lore might recall Linus' oft-quoted retort: "I LOVE MANKIND...IT'S **PEOPLE** I CAN'T STAND!!"

Having just finished a series of holidays that expected us to be thankful for and in close contact with family and neighbors, we might have recognized a bit of Linus in us. We can have a warm fuzzy feeling about humankind, while still being utterly irritated by our next door neighbor who can't maintain his yard. Or, we cut ourselves off from the family member whose political views seem absurd or dangerous. We love the concept of humanity united in love, but *people....?* The *people* are the problem.



Jan-April 2022

It seems fitting then that we kick off our Presbytery's 2-year ministry vitality initiative with a focus on Caring Relationships. This focus comes from the Presbyterian Mission Agency's Office of Theology, Formation, and Evangelism, which identified [7 marks of vitality](#) in its survey of congregational life. The presence of Caring Relationships was one marker of a vital ministry.

As we move through each of the seven marks by 2023, we are guided by Romans 12. Appropos of my *Peanuts* reference, we read, "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor." (Romans 12:9-10 NRSV). "Let love be genuine..." for humankind and for the people. We are to love our annoying neighbor and estranged family member, not just the concept of humanity. For if we love the idea of human connection, but hate the person, then our love is not genuine.

This journey of caring relationships will be rocky and winding. One step will require us to re-humanize people. Profoundly and repeatedly, we are all conditioned to fear and dehumanize people who look, speak, behave, or believe differently than us. If they say or write something with which we disagree, we feel justified in writing them off. When we don't see "the other" as a real person, it is easy to discount their feelings or values.

A second step will be to examine whether our actions of caring are available to all. Are we unwittingly putting up barriers that keep people from receiving the fullness of God's grace and love through the church? Do we show our care differently depending on whether someone is a member of our congregation, a community neighbor, a person experiencing homelessness, or a snowbird? With the pandemic, who is isolated and how can they experience caring?

There are questions to explore around self-care, unhealthy or destructive relationships, and appropriate boundaries. Our Commission on Pastoral Ministries revised our ethical and boundaries policy, with an emphasis on mandatory reporter training and the goal of protecting children and vulnerable adults. The Presbytery will have an opportunity to vote on the draft policy at its February meeting. This is one important way we demonstrate Caring Relationships as a church community.

I am eager to hear your stories of caring and ways the Presbytery can support you. Watch for opportunities to share and resource announcements soon.