

Fresh Impressions

Amen!

January 24, 2018

Today we close out the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Joining with Christians around the world, we offered prayers for greater dialogue and reconciliation. Of course, the need doesn't end just because the week is over. How will you continue to pray for restoration of the Christian family?

The exercise leads me to think more deeply about prayer. I confess that my prayer life needs more discipline. In those times when I pray faithfully and regularly, the presence of the Holy is powerful. I feel a greater sense of peace and guidance.

But, for some reason, I struggle with the discipline it takes. You probably don't want to hear this from your new Presbytery Executive, but I need to remember to make space for personal prayer. Like so many other things that we know are "good for us" (exercise, healthy eating, using our turn signal), our prayer practices – what we actually do and not what we should do – can fall short without diligence.

For that reason, I was glad to read the January 8 edition of *The Presbyterian Outlook* entitled "Prayer: The Outlook at 200." If you don't have a subscription, stop by the Presbytery Office and we'll lend ours to you. One of the articles, "Learning to Accept the Gift of Prayer," by Rev. Nadine Ellsworth-Moran, acknowledges the challenge to prayer practices. She gives a good reminder, "We have to find the prayer practices that resonate most with us (otherwise we will not do them); we have to be patient with ourselves as we learn; and we have to remember that in delving into new (and perhaps intimidating) prayer practices, we are encouraged to seek guides such as pastors or spiritual directors." Ellsworth-Moran offers a brief description of rich practices, such as praying the hours, examen, breath prayer, and *lectio divina*. If any of these are foreign to you, there are ample materials online and in print to guide you.

Another author, Gary Neal Hansen, suggests ways that we can "Pray Like A Reformer." This includes praying the psalms like Calvin. The daily lectionary is available from the national office (see the subscription link under Pastoral Resources and Education <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/newsletter-subscription/>), with both morning and evening psalms delivered to you by email. He also urges us to pray like Luther through the Lord's Prayer, but with a twist: "It seemed obvious to the Reformer that what we call the Lord's Prayer was really a list of topics. He thought we should take each line as one of the subjects Jesus invited (or commanded) us to talk to God about, and spend time praying on it in our own words." For instance, what do we need to discuss with God about forgiveness ("forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors") or temptation ("lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil")? Hansen concludes, "If you take Luther's advice and spend even a few minutes praying each topic of the Lord's Prayer in your own words, you will find yourself bringing topics to God that you would otherwise neglect."

These are tools. They don't necessarily correct the lack of discipline, but they get us started. The Holy Spirit will often take it from there. Amen!