PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

A Message from PCC

August 31, 2023

Members and Friends of Penn Central Conference,

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he "… for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." (Matthew 16:23b)

Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew reading of the lectionary this week (16:21-28) are some of the most challenging in the gospels. After rebuking Peter, Jesus speaks plainly: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (16:24) This is a passage that readers and preachers have wrangled with for centuries. What sense does it make for us now?

The phrase "pick up your cross" has been misused countless times. We easily turn it into a cliche that diminishes its power and diffuses the impact. We may joke about it, saying "Well, that's just your cross to bear" (with rolled eyes for effect). But we also use it to gloss over one's suffering by claiming that illness, divorce, parental responsibility, and more are "crosses to bear" that will somehow bring wisdom. Only one person picks up a cross: Jesus. And it is on the way to die for proclaiming the gospel. When we truly pick up our cross, we are setting aside everything else to humble ourselves and carry the weight of the persecution that comes with carrying the specific cross of the gospel.

Rarely do we suffer now for proclaiming the gospel, at least in the United States. And rarely would we experience martyrdom. Perhaps the phrase holds more truth for those Christians in other parts of the world who do face direct persecution for living and preaching the gospel (Christian LGBTQ activists in Afri-

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Contact us!

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Prayers for Penn Central Conference

Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

This week, we pray for each other as we continue to live into God's calling...

St. John's UCC, Denver

Dover UCC, Dover

Salem UCC, Dover

Mt. Olivet UCC, East Berlin



ca, for example, or Christians in Eritrea or North Korea).

Still, it doesn't mean there is no enlightenment in these words of Jesus. Perhaps more spiritually challenging for us in our culture are the words that precede picking up a cross. That is, Jesus' command that would-be followers must "deny themselves" first. Talk about an unpopular phrase in American culture these days! "Denying ourselves" smacks of sacrifice and self-abnegation which are definitely not in vogue. However, all wisdom traditions acknowledge that the denial of the self (or ego) is necessary for enlightenment and for true compassion. Only when we get out of our own way can we lean into the life Jesus calls us to.

The denial of self is not a superficial act (like passing up a donut) but instead involves critical self-reflection to determine which parts of our own motives, desires, inclinations, and habits keep us from freely loving our neighbors, providing aid when needed, and praying for our enemies. Healthy denial of self is a spiritual practice that allows us to lean into the challenging parts of life (often among challenging people) in order to become an instrument of Christ's peace

Jesus knows humanity and how we will resist his call, find ways to lighten the sting of his words, deflect, speak superficially and simply ignore his commands. So consider what denying yourself would look like in your own life. Not unhealthy or harmful self-abnegation but allowing our own selves to take a backseat so we can get on with living more like Jesus.

Peace,

Carrie

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call

Conference Minister

Penn Central Conference.

Hawaii Fires

The United Church of Christ, through Wider Church Ministries, is issuing a special appeal to provide essential items and long-term support to those impacted by wildfires across Hawaii, including the deadly wildfires on the island of Maui. https://support.ucc.org/hawaii-wildfires

The Hawaii Conference also shared a link to donate as well as other information and a prayer, you can read here: https://conta.cc/4439NJP

A message from Megan Swope, founder of The Period Project Harrisburg, to Penn Central Conference:

Hello! I want to continue to celebrate the contribution made at the Penn Central Conference Annual Meeting in June to The Period Project Harrisburg. As a result of those efforts, we were able to help MORE PEOPLE this month, spending less than we would have had to on our wholesale order for our Day of Impact 2023. As of August 9, ALL of the products collected by Penn Central Conference have been distributed as part of 1,000 period packs! Thanks to Penn Central Conference UCC, we were able to bless Bethesda Mission, She's Somebody's Daughter, Beacon Clinic for Health and Hope, Hershey Food Pantry, Hummelstown Food Pantry, Harrisburg City Schools, Brethren Housing, and Steelton-Highspire School District! Tonight, a menstruator may not have to suffer a loss of dignity, risk their health, or miss school or work… because of the generosity of Penn Central Conference donors. THANK YOU SO MUCH! I am truly honored and deeply grateful to Penn Central Conference UCC.

Lay Leader Boundary Awareness – Healthy Church Relations – This 90-minute introductory session for lay leaders in the church will introduce issues of power, multiple relationships, church money, social media, and health information sharing practices built around a behavioral covenant. It's sure to be an enlightening and empowering conversation. Please join this important conversation at 6:30pm on September 18th.

http://events.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=betijzaab&oeidk=a07ejwrvht8d36a12ef