

# From Our Conference Minister

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## **Self Denial As An Act of Love** (Matthew 16: 21-28)

It has been heartbreaking to watch the news out of Texas and Louisiana where thousands of people have been displaced from their homes and their lives turned upside down by hurricane Harvey. In compassionate response, hundreds of volunteers, first responders and churches have coordinated efforts to provide shelter and care, on the ground, in places like Houston.

Disasters seem to bring out the best in most of us and often provokes self-denial as an act of love where *“Love is the doorway through which the human soul passes from selfishness to service and from solitude to kinship with all humankind.”*  
(Anonymous)

Jesus told his disciples, *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”* (v. 24-25)

The self-denial Jesus referred to is a call to recognize and to let go of whatever keeps us from a fuller relationship with God and each another. Jan Richardson suggests that self-denial compels us to ask ourselves, *“What are the actions, what is the way of being that will leave the greatest amount of room for God’s love, grace, and compassion to move in and through me?”*

Several of our PCC congregations have been embodying self-denial through acts of love, grace and compassion in the following ways:

- News of the extreme flooding in Texas from hurricane Harvey prompted questions from several PCC churches about how to support the victims. Several churches have responded with prayer and by sending checks for **OGHS** to the Conference Office. In addition to prayer, there are several other [ways to help](#). The PCC Disaster Readiness and Response Team continues to provide updated information on additional needs and worship resources
- Trinity UCC in Waynesboro has organized prayer vigils to spread love in the midst of hate messages and flyers being distributed by white supremacist groups in their area. [Study materials](#) about race and diversity are also available to engage study and conversations
- Zion Arendtsville UCC provided much needed school supplies to Hoffman Academy (Hoffman Homes for Youth). These supplies will get the children and faculty off to a good start for the new school year

These are only a few of the ways followers of Jesus are responding to the call to *“...deny themselves and take up their cross...”* The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer asserted, *“When Christ calls a man to follow him, he calls him to die.”*

Self-denial is a call to die to self, to begin thinking more like God and be shaped by God’s heart. That which pleases God should also please us. That which hurts the heart of God should also hurt our hearts. We are God’s image-bearers, created to bring glory to God in all that we do.

Jesus implores us to choose the way of the cross which is self-denial and love.

*“Only a life given away for love’s sake is a life worth living.”*

Frederick Buechner

*In Christ,*

*Monica*

Rev. Dr. Monica Dawkins-Smith, Conference Minister and President