PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

A Message from PCC

August 7, 2024

Greetings Penn Central members and friends,

"Let no evil talk come out of your mouths… so that your words may give grace to those who hear." (Ephesians 4:29, NRSV)

Recently I did an internet search for "self-guided walking tours of Berlin." I will be there for an extra day in September with our German partners and wanted to see what sites were highly recommended. I found a listing by a woman who had been to Berlin, put her own list of 'best sites' together, and then published it. I was interested in her list, but I quickly fell down a rabbit hole by reading the comments in response to her post. Before I knew it, I was deep in an underground pit of condescension, jeering, meanness, insults, and put-downs. When I resurfaced, I sat in stunned silence. All I could think was, "Humans are awful." Scratch the surface with an innocuous online post, guarantee anonymity, and watch the claws and frothing emerge.

In contrast, reading the fourth chapter in Paul's letter to the Ephesians seems like a dispatch from another world. Paul writes in poetic prose about living in unity and peace, the role of love, and the gift of the grace of God. The section of Chapter 4 included in this week's lectionary (verses 25-32) finishes out this remarkable chapter. Paul's expectation of followers of Jesus is that believers will differentiate themselves from others around them. Their (our) speech, in particular, will be mindful – not letting the sun go down on our anger, making sure our words build up others, allowing speech to give grace, and putting away malice, slander, and bitterness.

As I thought about my brief experience with the on-line search I wondered if verse 31 might now be translated "Put away from you all snarkiness and disrespect and trolling and outrage and offence, together with all hatefulness." Not a bad way to think about it.

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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...

Colonial Park UCC, Harrisburg

Pennbrook UCC, Harrisburg

St. Thomas UCC, Harrisburg

Salem UCC, Harrisburg



Paul was writing about those within the early Christian community, not about strangers having random social encounters. And yet the same trolling, outrage, and offense occur within our faith communities. I hear, on a regular basis, members and leaders of churches casually disrespecting, condemning, and slandering other Christian leaders and believers – usually because they are on different sides of social issues. And I wonder, when did this become blithely acceptable to us? I am asking myself too, when do I do this? Can I hear myself when I do? Why do I feel I can so easily judge another's faith or practice? The questions are always hard for me to answer. The answers from within my own heart are hard to hear.

And while some might read Paul's closing words, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you" as Pollyanna 'nice-nice,' I see them differently. I see the instructions in Chapter 4 as some of the most difficult discipleship practices we face. I find it easier to slide into casual judgement of others than to push myself to hold that person in prayer or think about them as God's own child.

In the weeks and months to come, I will be reflecting more deeply on Paul's instructions: "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear." Will you join me?

Peace,

Carrie

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call

Conference Minister

Penn Central Conference

UCC Wellness Ministries Handbook for Visitation

Are you visiting a person or writing a note on behalf of the church? Aren't sure what to do or say to this person?

This handbook furnishes information to guide you in each encounter and provides scripture passages, prayers, and blessings you can easily use.

This Handbook replaces the now-retired Called to Care Pocket Handbook for Caregivers.

The Handbook will be available from the UCC Resources Store by early fall.

