

Peace Be With You

Many United Methodist churches share Passing the Peace each Sunday. It's that moment when we turn to one another and say, "The peace of Christ be with you." "And also with you."

According to *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, this

moment, "is an act of reconciliation and blessing, based on New Testament Christian practice... It is not simply **our** peace but the peace of **Christ** that we offer." (emphasis added)



That distinction matters. Passing the Peace is not the same thing as greeting friends or welcoming visitors, or a time to catch up—though all of those are wonderful parts of church life!

In worship, Passing the Peace reminds us that we come before God as a reconciled people. We are reminded of the forgiveness we have received and the Peace we are called to extend. It prepares our hearts to pray, to listen to God's Word with openness and grace, and to receive Holy Communion.

Over the years, I've heard a range of feelings about this time in the service. Some love it—it's their favorite thing, to move around and see friends they haven't spoken to all week. Others (often our quiet introverts) dread this part of the service and would happily skip it (indeed, I've known people who arrive late just to miss it!). And then there are those who join us online, for whom a long, unstructured greeting time is literally a blank screen. And if anyone new is checking us out online, (as people often do now before attending worship on campus), they likely move on to another online service and another church and never end up visiting us. All of these perspectives matter, because all come from a place of caring deeply about what it means to be a church community. Our goal, as with so many things in church life, is to hold these values together—to honor both community and worship.

Worship is about God. At St. Matthew, we devote approximately 60 minutes in our **entire week** to the worship of God. It is important to focus on God during our time of worship. Yet the God we worship calls us into reconciled community. So, we will continue to include Passing the Peace as a meaningful part of our service while keeping it focused on blessing one another with **Christ's** peace.

And of course, for those who love to visit, our fellowship time before and after worship is the perfect time to catch up or continue the conversation—coffee cup in hand, stories shared, laughter and friendship freely given. So, if there are friends you have not seen in a while, make a point of either arriving early enough to greet them, or sticking around for a few minutes after our worship of God has concluded.

And may every “Peace of Christ be with you” remind us that peace is not ours to keep—it is a gift to be shared, from God’s heart to ours, and from ours to the world.

May the peace of Christ be yours,

Pastor Ann