

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” *Luke 24:32*

### **Together We Are Strong**

I love the story of the walk to Emmaus. I love how human it is—

- how the disciples, not yet believing that Jesus had risen, did what some folks do in the face of crisis—they went home
- how the women learned of the resurrection and told the disciples, but the men didn’t believe them
- that the risen Christ walked with them but they didn’t recognize him, thinking he was the most clueless stranger for not knowing the big news of the day
- they insisted that the clueless stranger stay with them, and only because of their hospitality to that stranger did they realize the Resurrection was real!

I preached on the passage yesterday, but what struck me this year is just the importance of knowing that Christ walks with us, whether or not we even recognize him. We have the blessing of being accompanied by Christ in human garb—but we gain strength from knowing that Christ is with us whenever and wherever two or three of us gather in his name.

This is especially important because the walk that we are called to take this year is a tough one. We know that the rebuilding of Altadena will take years with people partnering across past divisions. We’ve heard about immigrants—and people who look like immigrants—are being persecuted, whether or not they have documentation. And the constitutional protections churches have to carry out our work—the work of being a safe place, a place of welcome and healing—are being taken away. And people’s hard-won rights are being reversed, leaving folks vulnerable because of who they love or how they understand their gender identity.

Following the biblical model for ministry—that of partnerships, even partnerships across long-held divisions, even hatred—the Presbyterian Church tradition has always sought to walk alongside others. Former Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons once said “We are a ‘Do It Together’ people in a ‘Do It Yourself’ world.” And the importance of partnerships is mutual respect, even with people who we don’t recognize as sent by God.

Now that I am feeling better (thank you for your prayers), I’ve been able to get involved in community actions to help Altadena residents to recover. It was inspiring to attend a meeting of the Eaton Fire Collaborative, a group that includes local and national nonprofits, community groups, churches, and individual residents and volunteers gathering every Tuesday to share information and work towards a coordinated effort to address unmet needs, advocate for just development, and dream of a diverse and supportive Altadena community.

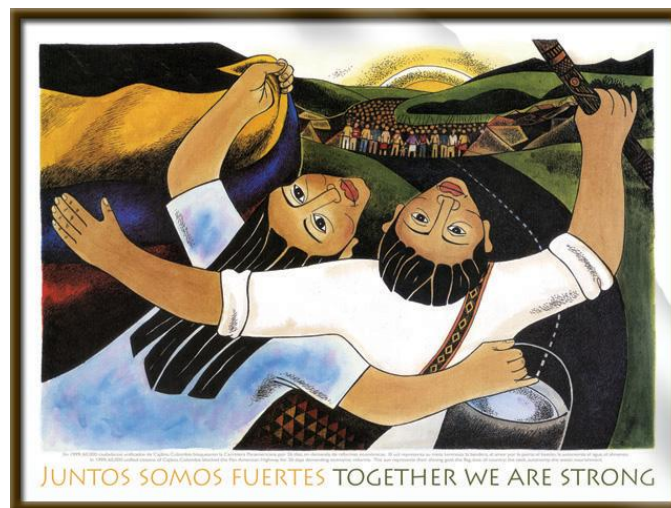
I’m also in fairly regular contact with Altadena Congregations Together Serving (ACTS) and the Clergy Community Coalition (CCC), who are seeking ways to support each other and share their resources. There are two events this coming Sunday that ACTS is sponsoring, both at Christ the Shepherd Lutheran Church on Altadena Drive. At 2 pm the Los Angeles Faith and Ecology Network is holding a vigil and rally in support of SB 684, the Polluters Pay Climate Superfund Act, which would require the largest fossil fuel corporations to pay for the climate devastation they have helped to cause across California. Then at 3 pm ACTS is holding a potluck, just a casual time for folks to

gather, relax, and check in with each other, all with the simple goal of reminding each other that they are not alone.

We as a Presbytery are able to do exciting things together. The Justice Peacemaking and Mission Committee is weighing several different ways to help the people with greatest need in our community, including immigrants, renters, and folks who have not been able to find adequate housing after the Eaton Fire. Two groups are immediately receiving funds that San Gabriel received from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. We are giving grocery gift cards to almost 30 families who are living in an apartment building that was damaged in the fire, but the folks are staying there because they have nowhere else to go, even though the repairs are slow in coming. For instance, even as we approach almost four months since the fire, there is still no hot water in the building. The other group is Door of Hope, who has been a recipient of presbytery offerings in the past. The director, Presbyterian minister Megan Katerjian, lost her own home in the fire. Yet the people of Door of Hope are taking ambitious action to place families in safe housing wherever they can find safe shelter. While the folks in the damaged apartment building have received in-kind donations such as blankets and beds, they do not have income due to the loss of their jobs. The families who are being helped by Door of Hope are receiving furniture and other goods to help them settle in their new homes.

We Presbyterians have been blessed with many gifts—financial resources, educated leadership, and practices that help to organize mission. We do not need to restrict these gifts to our own members, and in fact our churches are doing wonderful work reaching out in many ways to help their neighbors, by inviting folks onto their campuses, giving financial aid, and sharing their expertise in areas such as mental health, disaster recovery, and property management and development.

It is exciting to see how we can provide significant encouragement and support to our neighbors. Indeed, we are called to work together, with each other and with others of various faiths and no faith, in order to ensure more of our neighbors know the blessings that we have known. Certainly, together we are strong.



May we continue to live in Resurrection joy, confident that Jesus goes with us—and knowing that we are now the Body of Christ for today's world. Thanks be to God for blessing us, that we may be a blessing.

Continuing on our ministry journey,

*Wendy*