

Reflection - Ash Wednesday Observation

Dear San Gabriel Presbytery,

Grace and peace to you.

This year's Ash Wednesday Service was something sacred. As the young folks might say, "*it hit differently.*" And it truly did—because the Holy Spirit was on full display, moving through a community of believers who came together across denominations, traditions, and cultures to worship as one.

We were four different pastors—Rev. Tiffany Ashworth (Occidental Presbyterian Church), Rev. Violeta Sanders (Eagle Rock Lutheran Church), Rev. Jerem Lagahit (Los Angeles Filipino American United Church of Christ), and myself, Harlan Redmond (Interwoven Presbyterian Church)—representing **three different denominations**, and yet, standing shoulder to shoulder to serve and love one another in Christ. It wasn't just clergy coming together—it was **three different worship teams**, blending musical gifts in unity and joy. And let me tell you, when Pastor Jerem started singing, the room was *lifted*.

Ash Wednesday is a solemn day on the liturgical calendar. It marks the beginning of Lent—a season of reflection, repentance, and return. We remember our mortality with the words, "*from dust you came and to dust you shall return.*" But this year, those words took on a deeper meaning. When spoken in community—after praying, singing, and laying hands on one another—the truth of our shared fragility didn't feel isolating. It felt *holy*. It felt *healing*.

Under the collaborative vision of Rev. Tiffany Ashworth, what began last year as a joint service between her congregation and mine expanded this year into something beautifully ecumenical. This service wasn't just about the imposition of ashes—it was about the imposition of *grace*. It was about serving one another, confessing with one another, and standing in awe of the cross *together*.

We washed each other in prayer and song. We imposed ashes on each other's foreheads. We broke bread in fellowship afterward, sharing laughter and stories. It was more than ritual—it was *relationship*. More than tradition—it was *transformation*.

As busy as our lives can be, we often search for rest, for joy, for meaning. And sometimes, unexpectedly, those things show up in the form of a midweek worship service—with a multicultural mix of churches, three worship teams, four pastors, and the unmistakable presence of God.

Scripture tells us, "*where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.*" But let those gatherings be signs that the love of Christ transcends our denominations, our liturgies, our traditions. The road to the cross is not just personal—it is collective. It draws us together. It reconciles us. It calls us into community.

My prayer moving forward is that Ash Wednesday would continue to carry this ecumenical spirit. That more churches would embrace this moment not only as a reminder of our need for grace, but as a holy opportunity to reflect Christ's reconciling love. As Rev. Tiffany so beautifully showed us, part of our sin is division—but part of our redemption is gathering.

Thanks be to God.

With gratitude and hope,
Harlan Redmond