



## Let It Begin with Me

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I recently had the pleasure of attending the Annual Meeting of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ, where the 117 congregations of that Conference were invited to share in worship, learning, and relationship-building. The second day of their gathering began with a “Peacemakers Breakfast.” What a joy it was!

Conference members assembled around tables in the host church’s fellowship hall enjoying a light breakfast while a steady stream of individuals stepped to a podium to share their invitations and testimonials. In quick bits of limited time, each person talked about what their congregation or their community was doing to multiply love, build justice, and nurture peace. The issues they were engaging were diverse: homelessness and affordable housing, hunger, care for those living with HIV and AIDS, sponsorship of refugee families, immigration policy, the war in Iran, the occupation of Palestine and devastation of Gaza. Some were organizing state-wide advocacy efforts or protesting outside the halls of power in their communities and the state capitol. Others were providing shelter in their church buildings or delivering other vital services to meet critical needs. One group had traveled to Minneapolis in January to participate in the “Day of Truth and Freedom,” a mass demonstration of faith leaders and others from across the country protesting ICE’s “Operation Metro Surge.” It was an inspiring litany of witness, each effort they described motivated by a faith that compels its disciples to “do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God” as a



daily and enduring discipline (Micah 6:8 NRSVue).

The issues of our day are massive in scale and too numerous to count. It is easy to feel overwhelmed and to throw up our hands in despair, convinced there is nothing we can do to effect real change amidst all the chaos. But in fact the opposite is true: the only way to turn the tide is for each of us to do our part, where we are, in whatever ways we can. Each and every thing we do to extend compassion, to blaze a path toward justice, to stem hatred and make blessedly real our love of neighbor is a crucial building block of peacemaking in our time. No one is exempt from participating and no effort is fruitless.

As the breakfast and speeches drew to a close in Vermont that morning, attendees left their seats and joined hands in a circle encompassing the room. Then their voices rose in unison, a sung prayer of mutual encouragement and staunch commitment: “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.”

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

The Rev. Shari Prestemon serves as the Associate General Minister for Love of Neighbor and Co-Executive of Global Ministries in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.

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