WFJ | WITNESS FOR JUSTICE
A weekly commentary from the United Church of Christ
Issue #1333 | October 15, 2026

Where Do We Start?

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As people of the New Covenant, the moment we emerge from the waters of baptism we are given a towel and a basin and invited to roll up our sleeves and start washing feet.

But… where do we start?

Whose feet shall we wash? Where shall we set the basin of water down? Whose callouses and corns shall we meet with Christ-kindled eyes in this world where every human soul aches, and more besides?

In 1941, his eyes and ears freshly filled with the long shadows looming over the war-torn central European countryside, the American Quaker mystic Thomas R. Kelly wrote in his essay "The Eternal Now and Social Concern":

> I am persuaded that religious people do not with sufficient seriousness count on God as an active factor in the affairs of the world. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," but too many well-intentioned people are so preoccupied with the clatter of effort to do something for God that they don't hear [God] asking that [God] might do something through them (97).

In that spirit, I am unwilling simply to bring another cause to your attention this week—another worthy effort, another call to make to your representatives, another social media cause to signal boost, another sticker to put on your water bottle or another yard sign which jauntily proclaims your

bona fides while leaching microplastics into the topsoil.

And I will certainly not proclaim the false gospel of "just try harder!"

Yes, much in the world deserves our attention, our prayer, our care, our action. But God, in Their wisdom, has set limits for us. We cannot stand in two places at once. We cannot time travel. We cannot do everything on our lonesome, contrary to what our American catechesis would have us believe. Nor can we take on every worthy cause that crosses our field of view. As Kelly put it, "we cannot die on every cross, nor are we expected to" (109).

And yet, here we are, creatures in time caught up in the life of the Timeless One, towel and basin in hand. And dinner service is still not over.

As Minister for Ministerial Formation, my post behooves me to invite those seeking to answer God's knock at the door to listen more closely to which door She is knocking on. I suspect the most important questions we can seek to answer for ourselves in our lives of service to this wounded and wonder-filled world fall thus: "what am I called to do here? Which cry shall I answer? And whom will I join in that task?"

As such, I want to offer a perennial invitation to go deeper. To plunge to that place where the boundary between God and you grows vanishingly thin, that hidden Bethsaida where the life of God troubles the water of your soul and stirs you into what is truly *yours* to do.

This place, the wellspring of your being, is not hard to get to. You can get there through stillness and silence. You can get there through creativity and flow. You can get there through singing and ecstasy. You can get there in the transcendent experience of organized demonstrations or in small, simple acts of holy resistance as the greater Humanity coalesces from gathered human bodies to

to grab hold of that vaunted moral arc and bend it. For it is in all of us—it is what makes us Human.

But as you arrive in that place of stillness, listen. Yes, take in what the Spirit is saying not only to the Churches, but also to your own heart of hearts. Consent to it, again and again. And, in time, perhaps you will begin to sense how a rising tide of Presence moves you toward peculiar partnerships and priorities in this world full of worthy causes.

For "the Loving Presence does not burden us equally with all things, but considerately puts upon each of us just a few central tasks, as emphatic responsibilities. For each of us these special undertakings are our share in the joyous burdens of love" (109). And we are not in this alone.

For further reading, see Thomas R. Kelly, "The Eternal Now and Social Concern," in *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: HarperOne, 1996)

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