

*Beloved, let us love one another,
because love is from God;
everyone who loves is born of
God and knows God.*

I John 4:7

*My grace is sufficient for you,
for power is made perfect in
weakness.*

II Cor. 12:9

*Grace, mercy and peace will be
with us from God the Father
and from Jesus Christ, the
Father's Son, in truth and love.*

II John 3

*God proves his love for us in
that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:8

*May the God of steadfastness
and encouragement grant you to
live in harmony with one
another, in accordance with
Christ Jesus, so that together you
may with one voice glorify the
God and Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ...*

Romans 15: 5-7

*Like good stewards of the
manifold grace of God, serve one
another with whatever gift each
of you has received.*

I Peter 4:10

*Love the Lord your God with all
your heart, soul, mind and
strength, and love your neighbor
as yourself.*

Luke 10:27

*For Christ is our peace... he has
made both groups into one and
has broken down the dividing
wall, that is, the hostility
between us...*

Ephesians 2: 14-18

REFLECTIONS ON THE R-28 TASK FORCE

by Marilyn Paarlberg

A recommendation passed at last June's General Synod stating, among other things, that homosexual behavior is a sin according to scripture, and calling for the formation of an eight-member committee charged with the task of presenting recommendations for a "way forward" for the RCA, given our disagreements relative to homosexuality.

On the long drive home from that meeting, I remember thinking, "I wouldn't mind being on that task force." Be careful what you wish for.

Fast forward to November, when the R-28 Task Force was getting ready for our first face-to-face meeting: three days around a table in a curtained hotel conference room, with eight people whose baggage admittedly included disagreements, assumptions and stereotypes. But that's where the predictability ended.

One of the eight members, an elder from Iowa, had been designated as the facilitator of the group. In his preparatory email before that meeting, he asked each person to bring a scripture passage that would be read at several points throughout the three days. I was dubious. "What's to keep everybody from bringing a verse that seems to validate our own opinion?" I wondered.

But then I read the next sentence of the email: we were asked to bring a passage which we thought related to Paul's list in Galatians 5 of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Hmmm. I was still skeptical, but at least this would make it harder for someone to bring their favorite proof text.

We met one another over dinner, and everybody was on their best Christian behavior as we began to find common ground in shared life experiences. By dessert, there was laughter in the room, but I could feel my anxiety rising as we walked down the long hall to the conference room.

As it turned out, the only thing on our agenda that first evening was to take turns reading our chosen passages (see sidebar). No comments—just listen.

The room quieted, and the first person began to read. Before long, I began to feel a shift; we were gradually disarmed by the power of the Word. I went to sleep that night grateful for the wisdom of that Iowa elder.

As we inched along through our deliberations— and yes, disagreements— over the next two days, we stopped several times to read our passages aloud. As the meeting continued, I was struck with the fact that conversations were happening that “shouldn’t” have happened, in the sense that none of us could have predicted them, given where we started. We were listening deeply to one another, honoring each one’s faith, acknowledging each one’s perspective as a child of God. And wonder of wonders – love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control were evident among us.

At the close of our time together, we read our passages once more; they had become a kind of litany. As the words drifted around the table, I thought of that verse from the Psalms, “Let my prayers rise like incense before you.” I had a powerful, even mysterious sense of the tangible presence of the Spirit in that room, and that I wasn’t the only person in whom transformation had taken place. Not that positions were changed, but hearts were. Had we happened upon a way forward for the RCA without realizing it?



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