

December 6

This year's Advent devotionals will feature readings from publications by Pittsburgh Theological Seminary faculty members. Today's reading comes from *Urban Ministry* written by Ronald Peters, Henry L. Hillman Professor of Urban Ministry. To order the book visit Cokesbury.com.

The reading begins on Page 129:

It is important to stress that the theological goal of urban ministry in reducing stress, tension, and conflict is, in essence, the fundamental goal of the gospel of Jesus Christ: the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5). In urban ministry, however, the ministry of reconciliation is demonstrated in behavior among believers that embodies the ideals of divine compassion and justice promotion in tandem, regardless of hostilities that seek to confront, compete, and destroy emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Reconciliation in this context must be preemptive. By preemptive, I refer to an understanding of conflict resolution that involves *forgiveness* that *precedes or comes before repentance*. This is the theological precondition the urban practitioner must reflect and project to contending enemy factions before reconciliation can become possible.

Ordinarily, we think of reconciliation as involving "repentance" or a change of perspective on the part of the "enemy" or "adversary" before rapport or relationship can be favorably established. In preemptive reconciliation, love and respect are bestowed upon the person in conflict prior to his or her repentance or change of attitude in an effort to restore, initiate, or otherwise create a sense of community within the believer in Christ. Just as God initiated salvation for us through Jesus Christ's life and death, even before we repented, we must also preemptively affirm love and forgiveness for others.

Prayer

Loving God, you reach out to us with love and forgiveness so freely and unconditionally. Help us to be so Christ-like as to reach out to others in this way. Challenge us to be bearers of hope and peace in our city, in our nation, and all around the world. Through Christ we pray. Amen.