

Religion and the Common Good

2021 Henderson Summer Leadership Conference

Monday Opening Worship

with Rev. Liddy Barlow
Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania



Creating sacred space

- Welcome, friends, sisters, brothers, siblings in Christ. You cannot see them from where you are sitting, but all around you are your colleagues who are gathered for worship with you. Welcome to you who are joining this Conference from Arizona and Massachusetts, from Texas and South Carolina, from Hawaii, Singapore, London, and Quebec. Welcome to you who are joining from your apartments on the Pittsburgh Seminary Campus! From east and west, north and south, we gather, streaming together toward the mountain of God.

Creating sacred space

- I'm Rev. Liddy Barlow from Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania. Christian Associates is delighted to be a supporting partner in this year's Henderson Summer Leadership Conference. Just as Christian Associates brings together Christians who are Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, liberal and conservative, Black and white, rural and urban, so too does this year's SLC encourage us to imagine partnership across barriers and unity despite our differences as together we seek the common good.

Creating sacred space

- Where ever you are, I imagine you joining this Zoom meeting like you have joined so many others – in the same chair, at the same desk, where you have met with committees or written sermons or taken classes. As we begin in worship, I invite you to attend to the space around your screen. Is there something you can do to help set this space apart, during our time together? I gleefully give you permission to take that big stack of notebooks and planners and to-do lists, pick it all up, and set it down behind you. Don't worry, it will be there when you get back!

Acknowledging the land

- And now, in this new cleared off space – can you light a candle? Or set a tablecloth? Or place a beloved holy object? I'll give you a moment to prepare your space.
- While we attend to this space near our screens, we also take stock of the space we see outside our windows, the land from which we join. We acknowledge all those who lived in this land before us. Today, I join this gathering from New Hampshire, home of the Abenaki people, and I recognize their continued connection to this land. If you would like to recognize the first peoples of the land where you are, visit native-land.ca.
- Let's call ourselves to worship now, using the words on your screen. I invite you to speak these words aloud, even as you keep your mute button on, and I'm glad to have Sister Barbara Finch joining me in leadership.

Call to Worship

One: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob,

Many: **That God may teach us holy ways, and that we may walk in God's paths.**

One: Come, let us discover the common good, in a world where goodness is all too uncommon;

Many: **That all our neighbors may know abundant life and revolutionary love.**

One: Come, let us find the quiet center, worshiping God in spirit and in truth.

Many: **Let us praise God, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.**

Video: “Come and Find the Quiet Center,”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znFdXb97Uac>

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A reading from the prophet Micah

In days to come

the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised up above the hills.

Peoples shall stream to it,

and many nations shall come and say:

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”

A reading from the prophet Micah

*For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

*He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;*

A reading from the prophet Micah

but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

For all the peoples walk,
each in the name of its god,
but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God
forever and ever.

A reading from the prophet Micah

In that day, says the Lord,
I will assemble the lame
and gather those who have been driven away,
and those whom I have afflicted.
The lame I will make the remnant,
and those who were cast off, a strong nation;
and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion
now and forevermore.

Homily

- Starlings are little birds, unimpressive on their own.
- Together, starlings form murmurations, scaring away enemies, paying attention to their seven closest neighbors.
- Video: “Flight of the Starlings”:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4f_1_r80RY&t=61s
- People can murmurate too, like last summer after George Floyd.
- Video:
<https://twitter.com/NBCPhiladelphia/status/1269330816741650433>

Homily

- Sometimes people murmurate for good, confounding predators like injustice and hatred and war.
- Sometimes, like January 6, people murmurate for ill.
- The prophets imagine people streaming, murmuring, toward the house of God.
- We need to choose carefully how we murmurate.
- We dare imagine “the common good.” Can we murmurate in that direction?

Prayers of the People

God of majesty and wonder, you called the cosmos into being, lead starlings in intricate murmurations, and set in each human heart the desire to move in harmony with one another. We confess the brokenness of violence, racism, and division in our homes, our churches, our neighborhoods, our world. What are the places and situations that are most in need of peacemaking today? Hear our prayer and turn swords into plowshares, as we share our concerns using the Zoom chat.

(What places and situations are most in need of peace today?)

In a few words, share your prayers in the chat now.)

Prayers of the People

Gracious God, you have raised your mountain up above the hills, a guide and destination to all peoples. Help us lift up our eyes to you, the source of our help, trusting in your Spirit to guide our steps. Like Micah and Isaiah, you give us vision of a day of peace that dimly shines: a day when your kingdom will truly come on earth as it is in heaven. What do we see when we imagine that day? Hear our highest hopes for a world made new, as we share them now using the Zoom chat.

(What is your dream of the common good?

In a few words, type it into the chat now.)

Prayers of the People

Loving God, we give you thanks for this quiet center in the crowded lives we lead. As we begin this Henderson Summer Leadership Conference, we pray your blessing on all we will experience and discover in the next two days. Help us to find Sabbath restoration and Spirit-filled inspiration through this gathering. We thank you for the many people whose energy and expertise have shaped this Conference; abide with them as they teach, share, and manage technical details behind the scenes. For what are we most grateful today? Hear our prayers of thanksgiving, as we share them now using the Zoom chat.

(What inspires your gratitude today?)

In a few words, type it into the chat now.)

Prayers of the People

Even as we eagerly anticipate the experience of the next two days, we are mindful of all the concerns that preoccupy and worry us. We're conscious of neighbors in need of healing, lonely people who await our calls, emergent concerns that demand our attention. We're thinking of emails that need to be written, and tasks remaining to be done. Help us to give all these concerns over to you, trusting that you hold the whole world in your hands. What are the prayers that trouble our hearts today? Hear our cries and our worries, as we share them now using the Zoom chat.

(What other prayers are on your heart?)

In a few words, type them into the chat now.)

Prayer of Our Savior

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

Now and for ever.

Amen.

Hymn: "O Day of Peace"

Benediction

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. And may you know and live the blessing of God, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit, this day and every day. Amen.