

# Faith Working Through Love

Galatians 5:6b (and 1 Corinthians 13)

One of the core values of the Annual Conference is to continue building loving relationships with one another despite any differences we have. Love is having a hard time in our world and in the church community today. We are called to love and respect others even in the divisive times we find ourselves. At times, agape love, a love embodied by God's love for all humankind in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection seems impossible. Theologian, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, shares "if we are brave enough to love, strong enough to forgive, generous enough to rejoice in another's happiness, and wise enough to know there is enough love to go around for all of us, then we can achieve fulfillment that no other living creature will ever know."



God works in mysterious ways. Since last July at the end of our Annual Conference in Cincinnati, I have prayed and read scripture. I spent time in silence and being intentionally quiet, and for those who know me, that is not easy. Years ago, it became my main discipline as a Bethany Theological Seminary student. For this entire year, I spent time discerning what I believe God would have me lift up in our year together. What is it that God might want us together to focus on in the Church of the Brethren? Last year before the start of Annual Conference in Cincinnati and a couple of days before the ballot was presented, I had an encounter with a stranger that blew me away, and folks that is not easy to do. A fellow Christian informed me if I loved everybody, I would not, could not, should not get their support. I was taken by surprise. Just the statement, "I love everyone" could be interpreted as a threat, an agenda, or taking a particular side of an issue. It made me sad. I only responded that I prayed that all of us allow the Holy Spirit to guide our decision, and as willing and available servants of God, each have been called to love God and love our neighbors in whatever capacity. As I walked away, I said to myself, "Really, God?" "What are you preparing me for next?"

As the call of Moderator-elect was realized, the ominous task of choosing scripture and a logo for 2025 began. Throughout the year, I thought I had found just the right one and then an e-mail, a Facebook post, or a letter would appear, and I thought to myself, that is not the right one. Yet time and time again, the word "love" kept appearing. Then, came the words in Galatians 5:6B and it reads, "For the only thing that counts is faith working through love." (NRSV). Do we really understand true love, agape love? This leads me to 1 Corinthians 13 as the supportive scripture. A chapter used frequently for weddings and even funerals, but Apostle Paul wrote in response to a divided church in Corinth. Paul declared love as the greatest power in the church community and they are lacking a lot of it. The Corinthian Church is not even close to a love fest. The members were divided and yet their diversity generated both benefits and challenges. It was Paul's call to action. Apostle Paul describes this "work of love" in positive and negative terms. On the positive, love is patient, kind, and selfless. What love is not includes love is not self-seeking, short-tempered, and offensive. In other words, love does not hurt people! This agape love has feet to carry the Gospel, and is a tool-in-hand, serving kind of love like Jesus in the Neighborhood. Apostle Paul's love language unifies.

Designed by Debbie Noffsinger, our logo begins with the cross, reminding us of Jesus Christ ultimate love for us in his death on the cross and his resurrection. The middle of the cross reminds us of the Holy Spirit of God that dwells in us and in the heart as we live out examples of our faith working through love, feeling welcomed and worthy as we love and serve God and love and serve all our neighbors. It is my prayer for our dear Church of the Brethren, that we continue to learn more about God's love and sacrifice for us and our mission to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ into all parts of the world in love.