Forty Days of Graceful Hospitality
Bishop Connie Shelton

We are on a Lenten journey together, practicing Graceful Hospitality. Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. Historically, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by converts. It’s important that we discern WHY we practice our spiritual disciplines during these forty days so that we don’t misrepresent who Jesus is and who we are.

In our communion liturgy, we hear these words, “Christ our Lord invites to His table all who love Him, who earnestly repent of their sin, and seek to live in peace with one another.” Do you focus on the word “all” or “all who love him”? Or are you more drawn to the words, “who earnestly repent of their sin”? Or perhaps you cling to the words “who seek to live in peace with one another.” On our Lenten journey, I want to challenge us to focus on our own personal sin. There is a temptation to hear the words “repent of their sin” and look to our right or look to our left to name the sin of another person or group. Focus on YOUR sin, and I will focus on mine. And together, we will turn from our sin and seek to live in peace with one another. If living in peace with one another is not your desire, pay attention to what God may be asking of you.

In 1951, Bishop Paul N. Garber was assigned as the episcopal leader for eastern North Carolina. During Bishop Garber’s 12-year tenure, over 75 new congregations were established to welcome new people into communion with Jesus Christ. In the last 15 years, our Annual Conference has continued Bishop Garber’s legacy by establishing over 50 new faith communities. For Lent 2023, we celebrate the legacy of Bishop Garber and the ongoing co-creation of new places for new people to gather into communion with Jesus Christ. We also celebrate the 70th anniversary of the first call of the Ten Dollar Club, which has helped to build numerous churches across our conference.

On this Lenten journey of Graceful Hospitality, attending to sin in our lives, let’s be intentional about creating new places for new people who have not seen God’s love demonstrated by our words and actions. Graceful Hospitality - it’s who we are.