

WEEK OF LAITY 2024



# CARE IN PLAIN SIGHT



## What's Inside?

- Providing Care
- Stretching to Make a Connection
- A Safe and Effective Caregiver
- Thursdays in Black (TIB)
- Worship Litany Affirming Lay Leaders

We enter the year carrying some of what has been and also hoping for new realities. In our putting down and picking up of things, God is a constant. The resources we need to help one another already exist in our holy connections. We miss ways to care waiting for permission or instructions to care. Care is a bedrock of humanity. Care is a bedrock of Jesus' ministry. If we sing hymns, pray prayers, sit in pews, shake our heads at the news, but do not actionably care for others, it is unlikely we have lived into the gospel of Jesus.

This year, Rev. Dr. Milton Keys has provided three reflections to impact how we approach the faithful call to intentional care. This resource will close with an additional encouragement to collective caring across the church, and a worship litany to celebrate God's embodied love through laity.

Enjoy in the Spirit,

Monique Crain Spells  
Christian Education and Faith Formation

*Mark 2:1-5 NLT*

*When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven." [1]*

[1] Tyndale House Publishers, [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), Mk 2:1-5.

# PROVIDING CARE: BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

REV. DR. MILTON KEYS

Can you imagine the scene? Jesus is in a house ministering and there is no room for anyone to sit down. I imagine they are captivated by every word that Jesus speaks. Suddenly, something falls from the ceiling and the crowd then sees a big hole and a man being lowered in on a mat. The people in the house must have had no idea what to do, but Jesus knew what to do. Jesus saw the strange events as an opportunity to care for someone who needed him. Notice in the text that Jesus does not even ask why or how he got in the room. Jesus knew what was important; it was that he had something the man needed. Important to Jesus was the man receiving care. If that is what was important to Jesus, it begs another question. Why was it so hard for the man to get to Jesus?

We know from the story, when they found out Jesus was in the house people around town rushed to fill it. They knew the healer had come and was willing to heal those who could get to him. I imagine there was a concerted effort to find people who needed a touch from Jesus and make sure they could get into the house. However, I also imagine there was more of a focus on those who were able-bodied and could easily enter. More than likely, there was also a sense of urgency in getting to the house, which meant those who were most ambulatory would get the best seats in the house. Those who were not as mobile would sit in the back, or in the case of the man on the mat, would not be able to get into the building. This made me ponder another question. What accommodations are we making to get those who have disabilities into our churches?

*Mark 2:1-5 NLT*

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We in the Christian church believe the church is a place where people can receive healing, restoration, salvation, and community, all of which are vital parts of the abundant life God intends us to lead. Sunday morning is an opportunity to care for those who need it through preaching, worship and socialization. However, there are barriers that some people must overcome to experience the healing that is available in the local church. Some people, like the man on the mat, struggle to physically get into the building. Others might have some sensory challenges that make it hard for them to participate in service. How are we as Christians finding ways to help our guests overcome these obstacles? Do we even notice that the obstacles exist? Think of it this way: How many people on the way to see Jesus walked past four friends carrying a man on a mat? How many people offered to help them? Did anyone run ahead of them to make sure there was a path for the man to get through? It is possible that they did not even notice the man or his friends, because they were so focused on getting to Jesus themselves.

As we journey through this week of laity, I would like to invite you to change your focus from finding ways to get the most out of the church, to finding more ways to help others get to Jesus. By this, I do not mean your normal evangelism. Rather, I invite you to find ways to help those that have a hard time experiencing worship or even getting to worship feel more welcomed and a part of the beloved community. For example, you may spend a Sunday with a visually impaired member of the congregation helping them navigate the building as well as making sure they have a good experience in service. Let us take inspiration from the four friends of the man on the mat. They were willing to get the man to Jesus by any means necessary. Let us do the same for the members of our community who will have to overcome more obstacles than we do to get to Jesus.



Dr. Milton Keys leads his community as a teacher, pastor, sound engineer, and composer. Last year, a documentary about his life, *Masterpiece*, premiered at Newfields Museum's Tobias Theater in Indianapolis. Currently, he is Chief Technical Officer for Indy Urban Youth Music Academy and a Sound Engineer for Christian Theological Seminary's Chapel life. Milton completed his undergraduate education at Butler University and earned his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from Christian Theological Seminary.

Mark 3:1-5 NLT

*Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him. He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored!*

# STRETCHING TO MAKE A CONNECTION

REV. DR. MILTON KEYS

Mark chapter 3 begins with Jesus noticing a man with deformity in his hand. While we could discuss the implications of this man's physical disability, I would like to use the man as a metaphor for those of us in our churches who are having difficulties connecting with the community. The Bible says the man is unable to stretch out his hand; he cannot reach out. Physically, he could not shake someone's hand which is a kind of familiar greeting and connection. Think of the man as someone who would have a hard time making social connections in our Christian communities. Who are the people in our church who have problems connecting? It is likely someone in your church has difficulty because the PA system is too loud for their hearing. Perhaps, there is another person who is challenged because of social anxiety. Another person may have a disability causing them to have random outbursts during the services that are often seen as disruptive. What are we doing to ensure we welcome people with these obstacles to be a part of the beloved community?

Let us look at how Jesus handles this man in the text. First, the Bible says Jesus noticed the man. This is important because we often only notice those who make an effort to connect with us. It is easy to hide in a church. Worth repeating, it is easy to hide in a church. We can have a negative view of those who do not participate in the life of the church. We may see them as aloof or sometimes superficial Christians who do not want to do the work of the ministry. However, identifying those that are not participating could be an opportunity that we are missing to provide care.

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Jesus notices the man is having difficulty reaching out. This is the first thing the text points out. It means that when Jesus entered the synagogue, he assessed the room seeing who was being left out of the equation. Jesus looked for an opportunity to provide care to a person others were missing. On the other hand, there could have been some people in the synagogue that did not miss the opportunity, they just had a different perspective. For those who wanted to ensnare Jesus in controversy, the man with the deformity was an interruption to the Sabbath. He was an invitation for Jesus to work on the Sabbath and break the law. We should pause with that thought for just a moment. There were people in the church community who considered the man's healing an interruption to worship. Could it be some people are unable to connect in our congregations because we see them as obstacles to our personal worship? Are we missing opportunities to minister to others because we are too concerned with our own comfort?

When he asked the man to stand in the center of the room, Jesus provides a proper response to situations such as this. Jesus centers the man and identifies his need. We must center those in our communities whose disabilities make it hard for them to connect. Like Jesus, we must go the extra mile so they feel welcome and loved. This could be as simple as speaking with someone who usually does not communicate in congregational settings or inviting them to lead part of the worship service. It might also look like providing ways for them to connect, such as hearing aids or larger print so to read the bulletin easier. I am encouraged by the way Jesus heals the man. He simply tells him to stretch out his hand. The man's healing happened when he stretched. I believe we can provide healing and connection in our churches when we allow Jesus to stretch us to provide accommodations for those that need help making a connection.



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Mark 5:25-29

*“A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. For she thought to herself, ‘If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed.’ Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible condition.”*

# A SAFE AND EFFECTIVE CAREGIVER

REV. DR. MILTON KEYS

The woman with a chronic bleeding issue is a familiar story. When we hear the story, what comes to mind is the great faith of the woman, but the story also teaches us about what it means to be both a safe and effective caregiver. The woman had to have faith in someone, namely Jesus of Nazareth. The woman believed if she could make contact with Jesus, she would be made whole. As a matter of fact, she only got close enough to touch his clothing. This was a dangerous proposition for her. Because the woman's illness involved bleeding, she had societal right being out of her house and among the public. She had no societal right to touch anyone. She was “religiously” unclean and anybody she touched would be considered unclean. What would make a woman take such a big risk on such an outlandish hope?

I believe the woman knew Jesus was an available caregiver. Notice, I did not say healer. The text tells me that she had encounters with many doctors, many who were supposed to be healers but only took her money and did not offer her any relief. I wonder why that was. Was it because they did not know how to deal with her condition? Was it because she was a woman, and they did not listen to her when she explained her symptoms? Was it because she never had the money to get the treatment she needed? These are some of the problems people with disabilities face when seeking treatment for their conditions. Whatever the reason for the failures, I imagine the woman was sick and tired of going to doctors for help. Then why would she turn to Jesus? Why was Jesus not just another “healer” to her?

Mark 5:25-29

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I believe Jesus had two important qualities attracting the woman to him. These are qualities we should strive to have when offering care to others, especially those with a disability. First, Jesus was known for his results. The text tells us the woman had encountered doctors who left her worse than they found her. Often people with disabilities have bad experiences with people trying to help them. Some people offer help in ways that belittle or take away their agency. We must be careful when we are offering care to our neighbors who are disabled that we always check in with them to make sure our assistance is having a positive impact. The woman knew Jesus could change her life. Jesus offered care that always left those whom he was caring for better than he found them. Though being the son of God, Jesus never made those he was helping feel less than him, or unworthy of his generosity. When you work at caring for someone, what is the outcome? Does it help improve their situation? Does it make them feel better about themselves? Does it empower the person you are helping?

Secondly, the woman knew Jesus was safe. She was not supposed to be touching anyone. I imagine others could get very angry if they were made ceremonially unclean by an unwelcome touch, but it did not seem to bother Jesus. Somehow, she knew Jesus would know better. Throughout scripture, Jesus made it safe for those who were disabled or marginalized. Do people needing care feel safe with you? Do they feel empowered to ask you for help if needed? Can you be trusted with their secrets? Let us follow the example of Jesus and be safe and effective caregivers.



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1 Corinthians 1:9  
NRSV

*“God is faithful,  
by whom you  
were called into  
the partnership  
of his Son,  
Jesus Christ our  
Lord.”*

# COLLECTIVE CARE: THURSDAYS IN BLACK (TIB)

Join Disciples from across the USA and Canada in observing Thursdays in Black. The Thursdays in Black campaign, started by the World Council of Churches, aims to advocate for and dream of a world without gender-based violence. In every country, gender-based violence is a tragic reality. This violence is frequently hidden, and survivors are often silent, fearing stigma and further violence. We all have a responsibility to speak out against violence and to ensure that all humans are safe from rape and violence in all places in our societies.

The campaign is simple but profound. Wear black on Thursdays. Declare that you are part of the global movement resisting attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence. Share your Thursdays in Black selfies on social media and use the hashtag #ccdocthursdaysinblack.

More opportunities to engage with this campaign will be available in 2024, including a video premier on Thursday, January 25. This video will be available on a variety of Disciples-affiliated social media platforms, including Disciples Women, Disciples Home Missions, Global Ministries, and more.

Please also plan to join in conversations with other Disciples who are passionate about a world free of gender-based violence.

The first conversation will take place via Zoom on Saturday, February 3, at 10 AM ET/ 7 AM PT. Registration for this and future conversations are here:

<https://tinyurl.com/ccdocthursdaysinblackwebinars>

For more ideas on engaging in this global campaign, check out this flyer. <https://www.globalministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Thursdays-in-Black-CCDOC-Flyer-2023.pdf>





# PEOPLE WHO CARE: A WORSHIP LITANY

by Monique Crain Spells

**Worship  
Leader:**

**Great Creator, we thank you for the love, care,  
resistance, and leadership of Jesus.**

Lay Leaders:

As people called to care like Jesus, we desire hearts,  
minds, and actions saturated with your Spirit.

**Worship  
Leader:**

**This congregation celebrates its lay leaders for their  
sacrifices of time, gifts, and resources. Most  
importantly, we affirm and shine Light on their care.**

Lay Leaders:

We take in this sacred Light that it may fuel every  
interaction we have with God's beloved who are  
among us all of the time.

**Worship  
Leader:**

**At this church, we understand every human has care  
to give, and every human is one who needs care.**

Lay Leaders:

We willingly take up partnership with Jesus in caring  
for those in need. We also acknowledge; we, too, need  
care.

**Worship  
Leader:**

**Being a lay leader means you understand to care is  
not an optional part of your faith.**

Lay Leaders:

We take seriously being care leaders and leading with  
care. There is no love of Jesus, or for Jesus absent  
intentional care for others in need.

**All:**

**God, we affirm your Spirit alive in us through lay  
leaders. We will care like you care. Amen!**