

Building Community Through Forgiveness and Celebration

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CALL TO PRAYER

LEADER: Although there are challenges to building community, God calls us to serve one another and to form the body of Christ. Priest and author Henri Nouwen writes that forgiveness and celebration are essential, because forgiveness removes anger, resentment and bitterness, and celebration acknowledges the unique gifts each person brings to the community. Here are his words:

READER I: "There are two qualities of community. They are forgiveness and celebration. That is what makes community, whether it is a formal community, whether it is family community, whether it is a parish community, or whether it is an intentional community. These things — forgiveness and celebration — are essential. ... Forgiveness is really essential. If you want to live in community, you have to forgive, not once in a while, but every day. I think that before breakfast you have had 10 chances to forgive. ... We have to keep forgiving. Once we forgive, we can celebrate."

LEADER: Let's take a few moments of silence to remember a time when you were granted forgiveness. How did that experience change the relationship?

Pause for reflection

LEADER: Let us consider how forgiveness and celebration are intertwined. In Henri Nouwen's words:

READER II: "Celebration means to lift up the gifts of the people with whom we live. To lift them up and say, 'Hey, brother, hey, sister, I see something beautiful in you and I want to lift it up. I want to celebrate it. I want you to recognize your goodness. You have a gift, a gift of welcome. You have a gift of hospitality; you have a gift of

gentleness; you have a gift of humor. I want you to recognize it.' When we forgive people that they cannot give it all, we can celebrate what they have to give us. ... We can rejoice in it and say, 'You and you and you all have gifts that make me think of God's unconditional love. If I see you all together, then I start seeing more and more of God right among the people I'm living with.'"

RESPONSE

LEADER: Almighty God, help us to live and work in community with one another.

ALL: Hear our community, O Lord.

LEADER: Give us humility and honesty to ask for forgiveness, and give us patience to grant forgiveness to one another.

ALL: Hear our community, O Lord.

LEADER: Almighty God, help us to recognize our own gifts and the gifts of others and to rejoice in what you have given us.

ALL: Hear our community, O Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER

ALL: Almighty God, we give thanks for your unconditional love. As Jesus called the disciples into community, so too are we called to be in communion with one another. As we go about our work of healing in your name, guide us in forgiving and celebrating one another. We acknowledge that we are part of the whole body of Christ, and all our gifts are essential to building your kingdom on earth. Be with us as we strive to be a more perfect community. Amen.

The readings are taken from Henri Nouwen's talk "Solitude, Community and Ministry."