



# 2023 LENTEN STUDY

with Bishop Ken Carter

**Lenten Reflection**  
**Bishop Ken Carter**  
**March 15, 2023**

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes that followers of Jesus are scattered, like seeds that produce the growth of God's kingdom. He also notes that we are often scattered among our enemies. Bonhoeffer of course ministered and lived in the midst of the expression of White Supremacy that was Nazi Germany.

Followers of Jesus live among the enemies he taught us to love (Matthew 5. 44). Among our enemies we encounter resistance, harm, and disillusionment. This reality leads to two responses.

We give thanks for the physical presence of other Christians.  
And at other times we experience being alone in our convictions.

On the physical presence of other Christians, Bonhoeffer wrote:

“What is an inexpressible blessing from God for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trampled under foot by those who receive the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the community of Christians is a gift of grace, a gift from the Kingdom of God that can be taken from us any day—that the time still separating us from the most profound loneliness may be brief indeed., Therefore, let those who until now have had the privilege of living a Christian life together with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of their hearts. Let them thank God on their knees and realize: it is grace, nothing but grace, that we are still permitted to live in the community of Christians today.”

Over the past few years many of our experiences of community have been disrupted. The global pandemic. The political polarization. The denominational divisions.



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Bonhoeffer's gift to us is to help us reframe what community means for a follower of Jesus. Our community is not in our attraction to each other. Our community is not in our personal preferences.

Our community is found only in Jesus Christ. In him we are forgiven, and in him our neighbor is forgiven. This is the core of our faith. Jesus is Lord.

Bonhoeffer's witness is consistent with John Wesley, whose sermon on the "Catholic Spirit" also teaches us to share a core faith, to love one another and not to allow non-essentials to divide us.

We are more likely to experience community when we reframe what this really means. Bonhoeffer was focused on what community is and what community is not.

Community is possible as we recognize that we cannot save ourselves. In our own strength we do not create community. Community has already become a reality in Jesus Christ, who is our peace, who has broken down the dividing walls of hostility (Ephesians 2). And community in this life is a foretaste of the eternal relationships we will have with each other in Christ.

In a Lenten season of disaffiliation of a number of our local churches, we are called to reframe what community can mean for us.

In the present moment...

We are called to release other people to Christ.

We are called to distinguish between our grief over the loss of buildings—those departing with them, those remaining in them—and our grief over lost relationships—those with whom we no longer share community.



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And we are called to see the people moving toward us. These may be God's provision of community in a new day.

As Bonhoeffer writes, "We thank God for giving us other Christians to live by God's call, forgiveness and promise. We do not complain about what God does not give us; rather, we are thankful for what God gives us daily. And is not what has been given us enough: other believers who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of God's grace?"

**Questions: When you have sought to build Christian community, what has been your experience? And how can you begin to see and name experiences of Christian community that are not always obvious but are very real?**

Life Together, pages 4. 11.