

## **Response to Ordination / Installation Vows – W. Robert Martin, III**

### **(7) Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?**

I have always approached this question with slightly different terminology—using “accord” for peace, “connectionalism” for unity and “clarity” for the notion of purity. Do I promise to further the accord, the connectionalism, and the clarity of the church? My answer to this question is a resounding “YES”!

From its very inception, the church has grappled with conflict—disagreements and discords that have shattered its peace, broken its unity, and muddled the purity of far too many communities of faith. And because this is true, the false belief that complete and utter harmony can be achieved in our fallen and fallible world is too often adopted or attempted. Yet when disagreements arise, when various opinions are found to be oppositional, we too often retreat to our ideological or theological camps forgetting that there is One who sits at table with us in the midst of every conflict and in the face of each disharmony—whether those tables are found in our kitchens, or in our communities, or in the chancels of our churches. We have little chance, if any, in resolving our disagreements and differences of opinion within Christ’s Body without the full and faithful recognition of the third guest at table with us: God!

With the acknowledgement of God’s presence at table with us in tense times of dis-unity and un-peace, we can begin to live out one of the Historic Principles of Presbyterian Government—the old but foundational principle of “mutual forbearance” (F-3.0105) which states that “there are truths and forms with respect to which people of good character and principles may differ.” And when those times come (which they surely will), we are, as Paul writes to the Church in Ephesus, ever-called to forebear “one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

And so I believe with all my heart and soul that ministry is not about upholding the fortitude of my opinion but rather embodying forbearance toward those with whom I disagree or towards those who might disagree with my perspective! I made this promise to further the peace, unity and purity of the church in 1992 when I was ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament—and I have done my best (with God at table) to live out this promise in every parish I have served since.

Thanks be to God for the gift of faithful forbearance—and thanks be to God for the grace it embodies!

**(8) Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?**

I am responding to this question on the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, the day that we honor the powerful and prophetic pastor who once said, "...anybody can serve God. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace . . .and a soul generated by love."

My role and function as a pastor is one of embodied service. In the various ministries into which I have been called I have brought my entire being to the tasks at hand—my energy, in providing a ministry of presence to anyone who is hurt or hopeless; my intelligence, in grappling with the Scriptures through the task of solid exegesis and the tenor of social engagement; my imagination, in dreaming of God's reality that is still yet-to-be but yet is ever-coming; and, most importantly, my love and compassion—a love that comes from Christ's example lived out in the care and context of community.

In serving the people of God, I believe it is critical—week in and week out-- to re-remind the body of the immeasurable love that is poured out so freely upon them, compassion that fills their hearts with grace and regenerates their souls with love. This is why I close every service I lead with the following Benediction (this "Good Word"):

Go now into the beauty and blessedness of this day,  
knowing well that God is in your head and in your heart,  
on your left and on your right,  
behind you and ever-before you—  
loving each of you as if there was but one of you to love!  
Go in peace, to serve,  
imagination, to dream,  
and with an open heart, to love in Christ-like ways—  
this day and all days,  
now and forevermore! AMEN