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Life-long learning IS possible...for all of us.

I have a lot of books. Every home I have lived in has had books in every room. AND I mean EVERY room. When I moved back to Pennsylvania to serve in this interim position, I forced myself to only bring books I hadn't read yet. I almost finished those. I say almost, because I actually bought more since I have been here.

As a child reading was very difficult for me. I just couldn't understand why people kept saying they read for pleasure. How did they lose themselves in those books when I felt lost just trying to read in the first place? Well, when I became an adult, something clicked. I started reading for pleasure and I actually finished the books I picked up. Reading became something I welcomed instead of dreading. Learning became a joyful experience instead of something that only made me feel shame. Little by little I understood why my family was devoted to learning. Education was always emphasized in our household, but I was the late bloomer. However, I did bloom!!! Now I value life-long learning. I have appreciated how our capacity to learn may be different, but we can learn from the day we are born until the day we die.

Faith Formation is not just about Sunday School for children. Faith Formation, learning and being formed about our faith is something that continues throughout our lifetime. My hope is that the church will remember that all people have the capacity to learn, even if we do so in a variety of ways.

I had a parishioner while serving as an interim in a small church located in a dairy farm community. The New Century Hymnal (NCH) sampler just came out and they agreed to use it. Eventually that year they purchased the NCH and people were surprised that congregation was one of the first in the area to do so.

One Sunday I noticed that a gentleman in the congregation who always sang with gusto was very somber. That went on for a few Sundays and I thought...I bet he hates the new hymnal. So, I decided to make a visit at his home to see if something else was going on or if the hymnal had him twisted.

When I arrived, we engaged in the usual small talk and then I shared how I noticed he stopped singing and he looked somber in worship. I was concerned and wanted to check in and see if he was alright. He bowed his head for a few moments and then said, "I have only shared this with my wife. She is the only person who knows what I am going to tell you. I don't know how to read. I knew all the hymns in the old hymnal by heart. Now I can't read the new hymns and the old ones have different words." Then he looked up and we were face to face. I said, "Thank you for trusting me with that. You are very brave." We were both relieved for different reasons.

At the end of our conversation I asked, "What if we only used one new hymn a month? During Holy Seasons we would only sing one new hymn during the whole season. If we were going to sing a familiar hymn, we would sing from the old hymnal." He smiled and said, "Yes". By the end of the month, he was able to sing the new hymn. His face and body language changed. We both learned something new. We were both blessed. I am forever grateful for his vulnerability and honesty/

We all have different abilities. Sometimes the obvious barriers we recognize are easier to remove. It can be a little more challenging when they aren't so obvious. As people of faith, let's listen to each other's stories. There are God moments in those stories and the church is a better place when we make space for each other. Those stories can lead to life-long learning. Thanks be to God! May it be so!

Blessings and Peace,

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