Reflections Along the Way

Dear friends,

photo by Jennifer McKinney

Saying no does not come naturally to me.

Inside, I'm still the teenager who tried for hours to convince my mother that I could compete in a debate tournament and also play in a flute concert … which were happening at the same time, two hours' drive apart.

Though I've reluctantly given up on the possibility of bilocation, saying yes has still been a guiding principle of my ministry at Christian Associates. In my eagerness to foster visible unity among our diverse churches, I've tried to say yes as much as I possibly can. To accept every invitation. To try out every partnership. To pursue every opportunity. To fill up the calendar to the brim and the to-do list to the breaking point.

After all, good things come of saying yes. Yes helps you meet new people and make new connections. Yes builds trust and strengthens friendships. Any improv actor can remind you: a "yes, and" moves the action along, while a "no" can end it entirely.

Jesus does not command us to take a sabbatical. He says, instead, come to me all you who are weak and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

So, it's a little odd to hear my refrain lately: *No. Nope. Sorry. Not now. Can't be there. Ask again in mid-September.*

After eight years at Christian Associates, I'm embarking on a summer sabbatical. My last day in the office is June 3; I'll return on September 19. In between, I'll take naps. Read books. Visit family. For most of July and August, my family will explore the United Kingdom, house-sitting for friends as we experience both village and city life. In September, I'll travel to Germany for the World Council of Churches Assembly, catching a glimpse of the global dimension of ecumenical ministry.

As a person who says yes, it's been challenging for me to figure out how to understand this time. It's tempting to pack it full of activities, or to seek the exact right daily routine that will yield the kind of refreshment I'm hoping to find. It's tempting to think that I need to do sabbatical the right way, to check it off as one more accomplishment on the list.

But as a friend reminded me, Jesus does not command us to *take* a sabbatical. He says, instead, *come to me all you who are weak and heavy-laden, and I will* ***give*** *you rest.*

Holy rest is given, not taken. Sometimes, for the privileged, it comes in generous helpings, like this summer sabbatical. It can come in quieter ways too. You might find it in a glimpse of summer sky, a deep laugh with a dear friend, a sweet hour of prayer that calls you from a world of care. To everyone who is weary, the rest we need will come.

I pray that this summer, each of us will feel Jesus giving us rest: a gift that allows us to say no sometimes, for the sake of saying yes to God.

Your sister in Christ,

Liddy

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister
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PS – One of the most reluctant no's I have needed to say this summer will be my absence at *Pittsburgh Prays*, a significant opportunity to gather the Christians of our region at Heinz Field for a time of unity and worship. I have high hopes for this event, and I hope you will sign up to attend by visiting *pittsburghprays.com*.