

## Core Practices for Beloved Community

These are challenging times: the division, hostility, and violence seem to be unraveling the fabric of our nation. It is tempting to retreat into our in-groups, blame our enemies, or imagine peace as “my side” prevailing. We lament that the Church, too, has too often mirrored the culture of hostility, division and hatred rather than the fruits of the spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness.

The Body of Christ is called to something more: to show the world how God is gathering all people into a new humanity and beloved community (John 17:23). True Christian unity is not just agreement on doctrine or a surface-level togetherness, but holistic spiritual formation—loving God and neighbor, and living this love out in tangible ways, through belovedness, diversity, reconciliation, justice, and shalom.

I offer these practices to you below that were created by the UniteBoston team as part of our [Beloved Community Lab](#) curriculum. Don't hesitate to reach out if I can be of support in any way.

🙏 May each of us be peacemakers and ambassadors of reconciliation in our fractured world 🙏

- Rev. Kelly Fassett, Executive Director, UniteBoston, [kelly@uniteboston.com](mailto:kelly@uniteboston.com)

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Core Aspects of Christian Unity in our [Beloved Community Lab](#)

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## Exploring the Stool of Belovedness—God, Neighbor, and Self

Scripture talks about three different types of love. The New Testament writers, especially Paul and John, elevate agápē as the supreme expression of God’s character and the foundation of Christian community.

In the wider Greco-Roman world, love was often seen through eros (desire/attraction), philia (mutual friendship), or storgē (familial affection). These were usually conditional and based on reciprocity—loving those who were like you, useful to you, or socially acceptable.

Agápē, as the New Testament defined it, broke this mold. It emphasized self-giving love even for enemies, the poor, and strangers (cf. Matthew 5:44).

For Christians, agápē was not just a virtue but the very nature of God: “God is love (agápē)” (1 John 4:8). This redefined the divine-human relationship. Unlike the capricious Greco-Roman gods who demanded sacrifices, the Christian God gave Himself in sacrificial love through Christ (Romans 5:8).

This emphasis helped distinguish Christianity from both pagan religions and Judaism at the time—it presented God as universally loving and accessible to all, not just one nation or social class.

This was shocking in a society built on hierarchy, honor, and patronage. It gave dignity to those on the margins (slaves, women, the poor) and challenged the transactional nature of Roman relationships. In a stratified Roman society, this was radically subversive. A community where slaves and masters shared communion as equals embodied a revolutionary new social order. This egalitarian practice of love contributed to Christianity’s rapid spread, as it offered belonging and dignity across boundaries.

Early Christians saw agápē not simply as an inner virtue but as a way of life, a sign of the Church’s distinctiveness.

- The Church’s agápē feasts (shared meals including the poor) contrasted with elite Roman banquets, which excluded the lower classes.
- Tertullian (c. 200 AD) the early disciple wrote, "It is our care for the helpless, our practice of lovingkindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Look!' they say, 'How they love one another!' Look how they are prepared to die for one another." (Apology, 39),
- Augustine (4th–5th c.) made love the heart of Christian ethics: “Once for all, then, a short precept is given you: Love, and do what you will.” (Homilies on 1 John, 7.8)

The practice of caring for orphans, widows, and the sick—especially during plagues—demonstrated agápē in ways that made Christianity socially distinctive and also deeply attractive.

### Implications for Today

Theologically, agápē is both gift and command. It is poured into our hearts by the Spirit (Romans 5:5) yet requires daily practices of forgiveness, hospitality, and reconciliation. The Church's witness depends on embodying this love in visible, countercultural ways.

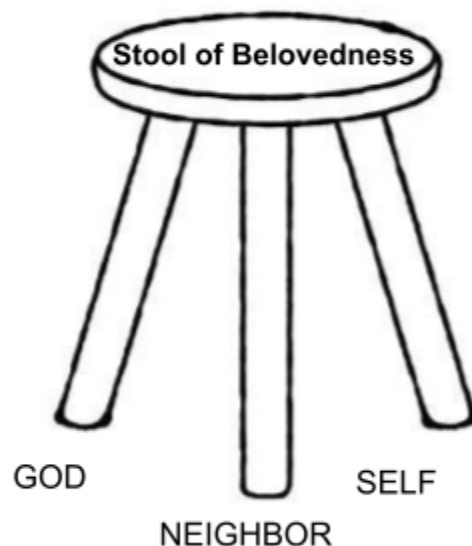
As Augustine reminds us, love is the hermeneutic key for Christian ethics: "Whoever thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought." (On Christian Doctrine, 1.36.40)

[Watch this video on Agape Love from The Bible Project.](#)

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## A Daily Practice of Belovedness

Jesus calls us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:36–40; Mark 12:28–31) a command that forms an unbreakable triangle of relationship between **God, neighbor, and self**. Matthew adds that "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 22:40). When one leg of this stool is neglected—when we struggle to receive God's love, devalue ourselves, or withhold love from others—our capacity to build beloved community is weakened.



Reflect and consider this question:

**Where in your life is love being disrupted—and why?**

Are there places where you are holding a distorted view of God, struggling to honor your own belovedness, or withholding love from a neighbor?

Consider these possible **barriers to belovedness**:

- **God:** A distorted view of God’s character—seeing God primarily as angry, distant, or unloving—can hinder our ability to receive and reflect God’s love to others.
- **Neighbor:** Dehumanization—failing to recognize the image of God (*imago Dei*) in others—can show up as stereotyping, fear of difference, prejudice, indifference to suffering, or reducing people to labels, ideologies, or issues.
- **Self:** When we prioritize our own interests, comfort, control, or sense of being “right” over others, or when we live out of unresolved wounds from traumatic experiences, it can hinder our capacity to love as God loves and blind us of the intrinsic interconnection with all things.

Our culture has a name for **dehumanization**, but no common word for its opposite. We believe the opposite is **rehumanization**—a return to seeing others through the lens of **belovedness** and **imago Dei**.

Now consider:

- What is the pattern of disconnection you see in yourself or your community?
- What kind of rehumanizing relationship might be required to shift this pattern?
- What would it look like to be a community that actively restores belovedness—within ourselves, with others, and before God?

Here are a few ways we can **restore belovedness**:

- **God:** Return to the truth of who God is—“a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6). Jesus reveals agape love perfectly through his life, death, and resurrection where he demonstrated sacrificial, reconciling love to all.
- **Self:** We can only extend belovedness to others as we receive it ourselves. This involves embracing our identity as both *beautiful and broken*, confessing our participation in systems of harm, and acknowledging the limits of our own understanding.
- **Neighbor:** Following Jesus’ command to love our neighbor, we are called to practice self-giving, sacrificial love that honors the *imago Dei* in every person. The Quakers have a saying, “that which is God is within each of us. When we look closely at others, we can see the image of God.”

## Core Practices to Re-humanize

- **1. Belovedness:** I will treat everyone as made in God’s image, knowing that the truest thing about every person is that they are a beloved child of God and bestowed with immeasurable divine worth (Gen 1:26). *The truest thing about this person is that they are a beloved child of God.*
  - *How can I see God’s image in them?*
- **2. Humble Curiosity:** It’s so easy to say “the problem is them... if only they would change...” Instead of assuming that they’re wrong, maybe I’m wrong, as we all see from a glass dimly (1 Cor 13:12). The Gospel calls us to repent, starting with ourselves.
  - If you find yourself getting triggered, recognize the need to do internal work to lean into discomfort with curiosity and heal from your own trauma, as not to persist postures of division and toxicity. Ask yourself, *Where is this discomfort coming from?*
  - When a comment carries emotional weight or deeper significance, lean in with curiosity: *Is there a story behind that that you’d like to share?*
- **3. Centering Voices on the Margins:** Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor and set the oppressed free (Lk 4:18). The gospel demands that we follow Jesus to give up our power and resources to those who are most marginalized and vulnerable, so all might flourish and point to the kingdom of God being among us (Lk 17:21).
  - *Who is not here? How can I stand in solidarity with them? How can I give up my own power and resources, so the most vulnerable among us might flourish?*
- **4. Love of ‘Enemy:’** By breaking down dividing walls and drawing very different people into his circle of disciples, Jesus created one diverse family, calling us to a love so radical it embraces even our ‘enemies’ (Mt. 5:43–48). The early church bore witness to this as Jews and Gentiles became one new humanity in Christ (Eph 2). We too are called to cross divides, build friendships beyond our siloes, and grow in love for those unlike us—so that Christ’s reconciling love is seen in us.
  - *Who do I see as an ‘enemy’? How can I draw closer to them and learn to love them well?*

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## Belovedness Practice In the News

Remind yourself of the following mantra as you read the news, go about your day, or as an examen to end your day. Practice seeing the belovedness of all you meet, especially someone who thinks, lives, votes differently than you – ***“The truest thing about you/them is that you/they are a beloved child of God. I am beloved. You are beloved. We are beloved.”***

This practice helps us stay rooted in God’s love while engaging the often overwhelming realities of our world.

### 1. I Am Beloved

- As you begin reading, watching, or scrolling, pause.
- Place your hand over your heart and quietly say: *“I am beloved.”*
- Repeat it three times—at the start, midway, and when you finish.
- Let this remind you that your identity is secure in God, not defined by the chaos of the news cycle.

### 2. You Are Beloved

- Picture the person or people in the story—whether victims, leaders, or even those causing harm.
- Invite Jesus to sit with you on the couch as you “debrief” together. Check the assumptions that you are holding. Seek to put yourself in their shoes and see why they might hold the understandings and postures that they do. What is their story?
- Imagine Jesus placing His hands on that person, breathing the Holy Spirit’s peace and healing over them.
- Whisper: *“You are beloved.”*
- Allow God to reframe how you see them—not excusing actions or neglecting to hold them accountable, but remembering their humanity as a beloved child of God and bestowed with inherent dignity and worth.

### 3. We Are Beloved

- Return to the story and ask: *What does belovedness invite me to do?*
- This may be:
  - Offering a prayer for those involved.
  - Sharing the story with compassion, not outrage.

- Taking one small action of solidarity or advocacy.
- Close by saying: “*We are beloved.*”—a reminder that we all are living in intrinsic interconnection between God, people, and creation.

***I am beloved. You are beloved. We are beloved.***

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✌️ *This practice helps us resist fear and despair, cultivating compassion and courage as we engage our world through the lens of God’s love. When each of us takes steps towards living out of this truth that “I am beloved, you are beloved, we are beloved,” we are moving the world a little closer towards shalom.*

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## **A Daily Charge to Keep In Step With the Holy Spirit**

In October 2024, the UniteBoston team wrote this litany and [80 church leaders joined us in signing onto](#) this shared commitment to walk in the way of peace. We invite you to use in your own contexts.

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As we go forth, we desire to live inspired by the example of Jesus Christ, who calls us to love unconditionally (Matt 22:37), and values every person as created in God's image (Gen 1:27), even in the face of disagreement or division. We seek to embody the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives, giving honor to all parts of the Body of Christ (Gal 5, 1 Cor 12):

With LOVE,

**we seek to bridge divides, stay curious, and pursue understanding.**

With JOY,

**we seek to uplift one another and celebrate our shared faith.**

With PEACE,

**we seek to be peacemakers in a world often filled with conflict.**

With PATIENCE,

**we seek to listen deeply and respond with grace.**

With KINDNESS,

**we seek to embody actions that reflect the compassion of Christ.**

With GOODNESS,

**we seek to stand firm in our convictions while respecting others.**

With FAITHFULNESS,

**we seek to remain committed to God and to one another.**

With GENTLENESS,

**we seek to speak words that heal and build up rather than harm.**

With SELF-CONTROL,

**we seek to temper our responses with wisdom and love.**

**As God's people, we remember the call to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). We go from here, as ambassadors of Christ's love, empowered to be peacemakers in our communities (Matt 5:9).**

May the Holy Spirit guide you, strengthen you, give you endless grace, and fill you with hope as it is only together that we bear witness to Christ's reconciling work and shalom in the world (Rev 7).