

A Message from the Moderator

September 2026

“Blessings on your story telling and story hearing!”



The Presbytery of the Miami Valley gathered in Wilmington on September 8. A huge thanks to the **Presbyterian Church of Wilmington** for their hospitality, including a delicious dinner! Thanks to all who led worship and shared the work of committees, commissions, and national body service. And thanks to all who came and participated in the gathering that day. We are better together!



The Wilmington Church made beautiful cards for everyone who attended.

After the meeting, as we finished our meal, the Rev. **Josh Rodriquez**, pastor of **Westminster Presbyterian Church, Piqua**, and the Rev. **Emily Haddox**, pastor of **Bath Presbyterian Church** and the presbytery's Vitality in Ministry Coordinator, led us in a brief workshop on telling our stories.

Josh asked us to draw a line on a piece of paper (we used crayons and construction paper). And then he asked us to mark the middle of that line, representing the half-point of our life (thus far). We were invited to write in key events in our lives along that line as we reflected on our stories. Each participant was given two kinds of candy, one sweet – like M & M's, and one sour or spicy – like Sour Patch Kids. The candies provided a way to associate events with positive or negative feelings around particular events in our lives.



These reflections not only held value for each of us as we thought about our lives but became resources for launching into telling our stories to one another. We were challenged

to engage with another member of the Presbytery for lunch, and to share our stories so that we can build and strengthen relationships together. *Tending to the quality of our relationships and extending hospitality to others.*

Storytelling and story hearing are acts of hospitality. Storytelling can be a powerful way to build community. It breaks down the fragmentation of our busy lives, and of technology, requiring us to focus on someone and on a narrative that is longer than a YouTube Short. And listening to the stories of others builds community also. It challenges our tendencies to reduce people into categories that we've developed over time or heard articulated in the public square.

And it also challenges our tendencies to reduce ourselves.

I'm not sure what it is, but sometimes we are our own harshest critics. And in being our own harshest critics, we look at someone else who looks like their life is together and think, "why can't my life look like that?". In reality, whoever we are looking at is struggling with stuff we cannot see, regardless of how polished they might appear. And most likely, there is a whole lot more goodness in our own lives than maybe we have even identified, even if we are in a time of struggle. Storytelling and hearing can help us develop grace for others and also gratitude for what God has given to us, and gratitude for God's presence with us.

Maybe take a moment today, and think about your story. Grab a piece of scrap paper and draw a line, mark the midpoint, and think about what happened early in our life and what happened more recently. What was hard? What was really, really good? **Your story is important.** As are your gifts, and talents, and your call to follow Jesus Christ. And our Presbytery is better because you are a part of it. The body of Christ is comprised of all of us together, each needed, each important. Sometimes we feel like an elbow compared to someone who seems like an eye, but all are needed.

And after you think about your story, think of someone you could ask to share their story with you. It will be a gift to them to have someone listen to them. And my guess is that it also will be a gift to you, reminding you of your story, and your gifts. God has called us all together. And each is important.

You are an important part of the life, ministry, witness and community of this presbytery. Thank you for being part of this body.

Blessings on your story telling and story hearing!

Diane

The Rev. Diane Ziegler

Moderator, Presbytery of the Miami Valley