Sermon by Synod Minister Heather Culuris

June, 2026

Romans 16:1-16:

16 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon[a] of the church at Cenchreae, **2** so that you may welcome her in the Lord, as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, **4** who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the gentiles. **5** Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert[b] in Asia for Christ. **6** Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. **7** Greet Andronicus and Junia,[c] my fellow Israelites who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. **8** Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. **9** Greet Urbanus, our coworker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. **10** Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. **11** Greet my fellow Israelite Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. **12** Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. **13** Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and greet his mother—a mother to me also. **14** Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. **15** Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. **16** Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

As I travel around our synod for Sunday worship, often I arrive early to get my bearings in the sanctuary and building. I look around the sanctuary, admiring many colorful stained glass windows or beautiful paintings of stories from the Bible. I also enjoy looking at the historic artifacts the church has collected from their early years until now. And then, I look at the pictures that the church has

displayed: of confirmation classes, of pastors who have served there, of members gathered for historic photos at milestone anniversaries. Sometimes I hear stories about the people in the pictures: The great-grandfather who was one of the founding members of the church, the Sunday school teacher who helped the person know Jesus' love, the organist who played the organ for over 40 years, the pastor who confirmed the person and officiated their wedding and baptized their children.

I love hearing these stories and seeing the pictures, because they tell a story of how God's love and grace has been spread and shared by the people in each very specific location. Every day people who were called by God, who showed God's love, who were co-workers in Christ, building up the body of Christ. Each of these people were real people, people who lived every day lives. They were people who shared the love of God in their families, their congregations, their communities. They are people who have names. They are people who are captured in memory and in photographs, remembered as Co-workers in Christ.

In today's reading from Romans, we hear the Apostle Paul greeting his own Co-workers in Christ. Paul lists over 25 people who he considers friends and fellow apostles and co-workers in the Gospel. Now, Paul and the Romans lived in a time when there were not photographs to capture the images of these people to look at in the future, but Paul remembers their names and their impact and greets them personally. This is a personal part of his letter to the Romans where Paul names and recognizes the ordinary, faithful saints of the early church who helped to spread the Gospel in the earliest years of the church. Paul describes each person and what they have meant in his life and ministry. He names men and women, families, churches that gather in households together for worship. He names people, men and women, who are deacons and apostles, leaders in the early church. He names those women and men who have risked their own lives for Paul and the Gospel as well as those who were in jail with Paul as well as those who

believed in Jesus before Paul himself even did. These are real people who worked side by side with Paul, spreading the Gospel, spreading the good news of Jesus' grace and love.

This image of being co-workers in Christ is found in other letters by Paul. When he writes to the Corithian church in two places, he uses this image. The first time is in 1 Corinthians Chapter 3: "For we are God's coworkers, working together; you are God's field, God's building." Later in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, he says again: "As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain."

The Christian church has continued from generation to generation because of all of those people who have been co-workers in Christ. The Gospel has been proclaimed from the earliest years of the church, like the church Paul is writing to in Rome, to our own day by men and women, co-workers in Christ, who share the message of Christ faithfully in the places they lived, the places they worked, among their families and friends and communities.

Take a moment now to remember some of those people who have been powerful influences on your faith. Remember, like Paul does, the people who have been like Pheobe or Prisca and Aquila for you. Remember those who have been co-workers in Christ in your congregation, your community, your life.

Now consider sharing your gratitude with them, if you are able. Send them a text, a note. Make a phone call. Send them greetings, just like Paul did in this letter to the Romans, letting them know how they impacted your life and faith. If they are no longer living, share their stories with others, honoring their legacy of faith and service by remembering them and telling their stories. Perhaps in your congregation, put together a family album filled with stories about the men and women who have been co-workers in Christ in your midst.

This passage from Romans also calls us as a church to pray about and reflect on how we raise up future co-workers in Christ. The message of redemption, grace, and love found in the Gospel is spoken through the voices and words of real people in our world. The Gospel's message is proclaimed through the lives of everyday real people of faith. We as Christians are each called to be co-workers in Christ. In our words, in our actions, in our prayers, in our generosity, in our forgiveness, in our service, in our acts of justice, we are called to be co-workers in Christ, just like those people that Paul named in his letter to the Romans. We are also called to raise up the next generations of people, called by Christ, to serve the church and the world. Who will serve the church in years to come as pastors and deacons, organists and musicians, Sunday School teachers and camp counselors, property board members and treasurers? You and I are called to help raise up the future leaders of our churches, the future co-workers in Christ, the future proclaimers of the Gospel. Consider how your congregation and you as a person of faith can encourage, support, and equip our next generations of co-workers in Christ.

Let us pray: God of all generations, we thank you for the men and women who have gone before us, living lives of faith, proclaiming your word, co-workers in your mission. Help us in our own lives to live out our faith in our words and actions, to be witnesses to you. Continue to raise up in your church faithful men and women who live and proclaim your Gospel, in our families, our congregations, our communities, and the world. Amen.