

Leamos Por Siempre



BY VILMARIE CINTRÓN OLIVIERI

Every first Saturday of the month, sitting on comfortable blankets in the shade of trees, the “Leamos Por Siempre” (“Reading Forever”) community gathers to read at the Luis Muñoz Rivera Park in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Sporting their “Yo amo leer” (“I love to read”) t-shirts, children and their parents meet for a morning of reading, conversation and book-related activities. As part of her master’s degree thesis project, Desiré Sánchez Cardona—a Presbyterian elder, elementary school teacher and mother of two children—created a website with reading recommendations and resources for parents looking for ways to foster a lifelong love for reading. As the website became known among parents in Puerto Rico, one of the website users asked when would they gather to read, and the reading group was born.

About the importance of reading as a community, Desiré says, “Books, just like life itself, are masterpieces, and the readers are the ones who interact with the book, contributing their experiences and sharing in the excitement, imagination and meaning that, together, they all give to the words and illustrations.”

For these reasons, I believe there is great value in reading as a community, offering readers the opportunity to



Avid Readers #1, Betty M. M. Wong

delve into different topics, listen to each other’s perspectives, open up to honest conversations, and learn together.

Honest conversation and shared learning are part of the reason Cindy and I decided to continue the “One Church, One Book” initiative, begun by the co-moderators of the 222nd General Assembly (2016), Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston. Stemming from our own experiences participating, we felt this provided continuous opportunities for reflection and deep conversations on relevant—at times difficult and challenging—topics within the community of faith. We invited the PC(USA) to continue the denomination-wide reading experience with *Neighborhood Church: Transforming Your Congregation into a*

Powerhouse for Mission by Krin Van Tatenhove and Rob Mueller.

Knowing that a community of readers is enriched by the inclusion of all generations, we also recommended the children’s book *Who Is My Neighbor?* Written by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso and illustrated by Denise Turu, the story takes place in an imaginary world where Blues and Yellows don’t get along. It is a beautiful re-telling of the Good Samaritan parable.

The commandment to love God and our neighbor is at the core of these two books. With the hustle and bustle of everyday life, taking the time to curl up with a good book might seem like a luxury. Yet the words of the prophet Hosea tell us such activity is just what we need: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (4:6). Will you consider finding ways to gather, virtually or in person, to read and engage in honest conversation as a community of faith?

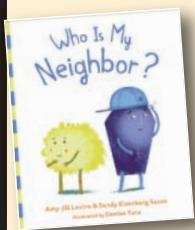
As Maestra Desiré said, “To read together also means to grow together. When we read with others, we remember that the true richness of life rests in sharing it.” May it be so.

With Cindy Kohlmann, Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri serves as co-moderator of the 223rd General Assembly.



Resources

Join or start a discussion around the two books Vilmarie recommends!



Who Is My Neighbor?
Written by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, illustrated by Denise Turu
Louisville, KY: Flyaway, 2019



Neighborhood Church: Transforming Your Congregation into a Powerhouse for Mission
By Krin Van Tatenhove and Rob Mueller
Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2019

Video and downloadable print resources to support group discussion are available at www.wjkbooks.com.