

Let Me Tell You a Love Story (published in the Faith and Reason section of the The Daily Item, 2/15/2026)

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The past few weeks have been an emotional roller coaster in our faith community. We have said goodbye to two saints gone before us, we have welcomed strangers who have quickly become family into our church for a warming shelter, while four dozen volunteers offering 1,000 hours of volunteer time, and one of our own family members received a kidney! After eight long years of waiting, we also offered prayers for the family of the one whose life ended and the gift of life given. Suffice it to say we have shed a few tears of joy and comfort. We have been and continue to be so very blessed to be able to do what we feel called and honored to do—just being the church.

To me, this is what love looks like. We have not been concerned with politics or division. We have been focused on being the church and answering the call for our neighbors in need. We have laughed and cried together. We have spent nights on hard cots and hours in both emergency and waiting rooms. We have served and shared dozens of meals and shared many stories. We have listened to and learned from one another as we opened a Warming Shelter and staffed it 24 hours a day for the 19 days of sub-freezing temperatures. And all of this is a part of our love story.

You see, when Jesus says what you have done for the least of these, you have done for me (Matthew 25:40), we want to make sure we are doing whatever we can to meet the needs of those we meet, right where they are, we want to serve Jesus where we meet them. As we opened our warming shelter on the evening of January 23rd, right before “snow-mageddon,” we had a lot to learn: How do we staff it? How do we provide food for our neighbors? How do we best support those in need? Would we make mistakes? Would we learn lessons? Would we want to do it again?

Oh, there were people who said, "Should we wait and find out what liability we have? Should we put together a game plan and have every slot full? Should we hold off to see if there really is a need and then we can respond?" The answer to all of those is probably, but—that's not how love stories begin. Love stories begin when we take a leap of faith, and for us it took place when we opened up God's house, aka our home, and everything began to fall into place. Did we learn lessons? Did we make mistakes? Did we get a bit weary? Sure. However, love happened, and we are better for it.

Now, here's where I want to invite you in. If you're reading this and thinking, "I wish I could be part of something like that," I have good news: you can. Many wonderful faith communities in the valley offer many of these things too. The warming shelter is closed now that temperatures have warmed, but the work doesn't stop. Every second and fourth Thursdays, we distribute fresh produce, proteins and non-perishable food through Fresh Express. Every Sunday, we gather to worship and ask ourselves: what does it mean to love like Jesus loves? Every day, there are neighbors in our community who need to know someone cares. That's not unique to our church—that's a calling available to anyone with a willing heart. To every church, synagogue and mosque in this valley. What love story is calling to you?

As we in the Christian faith move into Lent in the coming weeks, I want to challenge how we think about this season. Traditionally, we think of Lent as a time of sacrifice and withdrawal—give up something, do without, retreat inward and repent. But what if Lent is actually an invitation to deepen the work we've begun so that we may be drawn closer to Christ, so that we may live better in community one with another? What if fasting means breaking chains of injustice instead of giving up chocolate? What if the real spiritual discipline isn't self-denial, but self-giving? The warming shelter taught us or reminded us once again, that love isn't about having it all figured out before we act—it's about showing up, again and again, with open hands and open hearts, no judgement only warm welcome.

So, here's my question for you, dear one: What love story is God calling you or your community to live out? Maybe it's not a warming shelter. Maybe it's showing up for a lonely neighbor. Maybe it's standing with the grieving, or advocating for those without a voice, or simply choosing to see the humanity in someone society has written off. Maybe it's sitting in that waiting room or at that bedside. The shape of love looks different in different places—but the heartbeat is always the same: we see a need, we take a leap of faith, and we trust that love will figure it out as we go.

That's how love stories begin. And I think the world needs a lot more of them right now. Take a leap of faith into love with your neighbors, and I believe you'll find God already there—in the peace and joy of serving one another.

"Happy Valentine's Day!