

Rev. Carleen Gerber
The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme
Pastoral Prayer for October 11, 2026

To begin, this short fragment of a poem by Wendell Berry, whose long life as an author of prose and poetry ended just a few weeks ago:

“Work done in gratitude,
Kindly, and well, is prayer
You did not make yourself,
Yet you must keep yourself...”

Let us pray,

Great God of all creation, Fall descends upon us with her artist’s palette of color. The nights are crisp and cool. The clouds gather densely with the promise of rain. The Canada geese speak to one another on their flight across our skies. The evening air cleanses us with a breadth of renewal that nourishes our souls. In a moment of shared silence, remembering some treasured sight or sound of these last few days, we pause in sacred silence to offer our own silent prayer of gratitude.

And in Fall we turn to work; each of us to our own calling. The mystic Brother Lawrence said that work is a form of prayer. The poet tells us that “Work done is gratitude, kindly and well, is prayer.” So we work to bring in the winter’s wood, and put the garden to bed, and to fill the larder for the cold months ahead.

And we work to put our shoulder to the wheel to shape the kind of society we know we are capable of building.

In these coming weeks, God of mercy, division and distrust will threaten the civic fabric of the world around us. Our nation will move more deeply into the election cycle that brings inherent tensions even more sharply to bear. Tell us how to do your work, precious Lord. Help us to know how to be loving and yet courageous, clear and truthful in boldly proclaiming your vision of justice and truth in the civic arena. We surely did not make ourselves, and yet we must keep ourselves. Keep ourselves steady and true. Keep our integrity intact. Keep truth alive. Keep justice as a goal in our living. And yet, keep mutual respect and regard for all people intact. When we speak truth, we must speak it in love. Forthrightly, but in a loving manner.

We know that when there is not enough for some people to eat, we can plow a bigger garden, and build a bigger table. We can stretch our resources. We can share with more generosity; for that is how we keep ourselves on course to travel the way set before us in the life and teaching of Jesus the Christ. That is how we keep ourselves true and steady on course.

In the week ahead, be with all those who suffer, we pray. Comfort those who mourn, and those who know the incessant pain of loneliness and despair. Stand beside those who sit at the bedside of a loved one, keeping vigil through the night. Give a measure of protection and assurance to those who have no choice but to hear the guns of warfare shattering the peace around them. Be deep within the minds and souls of those who wield the most power in this world you so loved, that they might find within themselves the empathy that could change the course of history.

Be within each and every one of us as we make our way through the days to come. Grant us the resolve to seek justice and find within ourselves the compassion that receives others with grace and empathy. Grant us a keen mind that will discern how to speak truth to a world where your truth is under threat every day.

All this we pray in your name, O God in whom we live, and more and have our very being. Amen.

- Excerpt from Wendell Berry “the Farm” (The Sabbath Collection)