



901 Allegheny Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15233-1701
Phone: 412-323-1400
Fax: 412-323-2256
www.pghpresbytery.org

February 2017

Brothers and Sisters,

Once again in 2017 we focus our February presbytery meeting on the gifts and struggles of our African American brothers and sisters who have preceded us, who are now with us, and who will be leading the church forward in years to come. We are especially privileged to host the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson as our guest preacher. Dr. Nelson was elected overwhelmingly at last summer's General Assembly to serve as our first African American Stated Clerk. We will be blessed not only due to his esteemed office, but also by the passion he brings for Gospel witness in our place and time.

Less than two weeks prior to Rev. Nelson's visit, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary hosted the Most Rev. Michael Curry, the first African American to serve as Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church in the United States. Last summer, the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church welcomed its first African American bishop, the Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi. At virtually the same time, our General Assembly elected as co-Moderator an African American pastor from Washington D.C., the Rev. Denise Anderson.

God is raising up a new generation of African American leaders for the whole church! I believe we need their courage, clarity, and conviction more than we know. Strong African American leaders are critically important to the vitality of the church moving forward – not just for African American churches, but for the whole church.

This is why I am so thrilled at the emerging direction for our presbytery's "Freedom Rising" initiative! Its steering team has adopted as a primary goal the development of a new cohort of African American male leaders for the church and for society. Details are still under development, but we will hear more about this emerging presbytery ministry focus at a **Freedom Rising Luncheon at 11 a.m. at Pittsburgh Seminary on February 16**, before the presbytery meeting itself begins at 1 p.m. We will also hear at the luncheon about emerging developments in Freedom Rising efforts in other presbyteries, as well as nationally. In addition to the Rev. Nelson, representatives from the national Presbyterian Foundation, Presbyterian Mission Agency, and Special Offerings Office will be present at the luncheon. A public invitation to this luncheon, including a link to the registration form, is available [here](#). Please make every effort to attend both the luncheon and the presbytery meeting, if you believe that raising up new African American leadership truly matters for the sake of the church and the world.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sheldon".

Rev. Dr. Sheldon W. Sorge
General Minister

Seeking to be Faithful Together

Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement

In a spirit of trust and love, we promise we will . . .

Give them a hearing . . . listen before we answer.

Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" (John 7:50-51) If one gives answer before hearing, it is folly and shame. (Proverbs 18:13)

1. Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ:
 - we will keep our conversations and communications open for candid and forthright exchange;
 - we will not ask questions or make statements in a way which will intimidate or judge others.
2. Learn about various positions on a topic of disagreement.
3. State what we think we heard and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure we understand each other.

Speak the truth in love.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

4. Study the Bible together to better understand what God's Word says to us in our disagreement.
5. Share our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teaching.
6. Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity;
 - we will not engage in name-calling or labeling of others prior to, during, or following the discussion.
7. Share our personal experiences about the subject of disagreement so that others may fully understand our concerns.

Maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

8. Indicate where we agree with those of other viewpoints as well as where we disagree.
9. Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous and full of tension;
 - we will be ready to forgive and be forgiven.
10. Follow these additional Guidelines when we meet in decision-making bodies:
 - urge persons of various points to speak and promise to listen seriously;
 - seek conclusions informed by our points of agreement;
 - be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of those who do not agree with the majority and respect their rights of conscience;
 - abide by the decision of the majority, and if we disagree with it and wish to change it, work for that change in ways which are consistent with the Guidelines.
11. Include our disagreements in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all.

