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Dear Sisters and Brothers,

This is now my ninth presbytery meeting with you celebrating Black History Month. Over the years we have been blessed and inspired by sermons from an array of superb African American preachers at our presbytery meeting. This year we break that tradition as we welcome Jim Gilchrist, a white pastor, to our Black History month pulpit.

So why did our Amos 5:24 Ministry Team invite Jim to be this year's Black History Month preacher? I can't answer for them, but for me, I believe that if the church is to make any progress on racial reconciliation, the burden for that falls more on us white folk than on black folk.

Alas, most white folk don't want a change. In a recent Lifeway Research poll, only 37% of white church members said they'd like to see greater diversity in their congregation. Let's own up to the bitter truth that the church is segregated because that's how we want it. God help us.

We have a long way to go if our church is to demonstrate fully the rule of our Lord, in whose Body all people belong regardless of their ethnicity, and none can say of another, "I have no need of you." And the burden of that progress falls mainly upon white shoulders.

Our presbytery has two ministry teams that address matters of racial justice and reconciliation. Our Amos 5:24 Ministry Team works on identifying and addressing racism in our surrounding society. Two years ago, we launched a new ministry team, the Anti-Racism Transformation Team (ARTT), whose mission is to help our congregations address racial inequalities within our church family.

None of our congregations considers itself racist. Yet we have become comfortable with our mono-cultural status. Despite Scripture's clear testimony that the church of Jesus comprises all nations and tribes and peoples, we are comfortable with our particular congregation showing nothing of that variety. The more homogeneous our fellowship, the poorer we are for lack of gifts from people unlike ourselves. And even more seriously, the less faithfully we bear public witness to Jesus' ministry of reconciliation. We can do better. We must.

So I invite you to consider asking our ARTT to visit with your congregation. Their aim is not to browbeat and blame, but to invite us to become more faithful to the call of Christ in how we welcome people that don't look like us. I have shared elsewhere that the single biggest common denominator among congregations in our presbytery that are growing is that they intentionally reach out to welcome people who look different from themselves. So if your congregation is ready to grow, calling on ARTT might be a good first step! They are ready and eager to come, if invited. If you're interested, you can call me at 412-323-1401, and I will put you in touch with them.

Yours for reconciliation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheldon".

Sheldon

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.

STATED MEETING OF THE PITTSBURGH PRESBYTERY

February 8, 2018 – 1:00 pm

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Rev. Heather Schoenewolf (Moderator); Rev. Dr. Trent Hancock (Senior Vice-Moderator)

Pittsburgh Presbytery is a covenant community

† *formed by the triune God;*

† *called to share together in the ongoing life & ministry of Jesus Christ*

† *proclaiming & demonstrating the Gospel publicly in word & deed in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

PRE-PRESBYTERY EVENTS

Breaking Free: Answering God's Call – Amos 5:24 (11:00 am – 12:30 p.m.)

(Luncheon and panel discussion; reservations required by 2/1/18)

PRESBYTERY MEETING DOCKET – 1:00 pm

I. Opening Prayer & Call to Order

Gathering in Worship – The Rev. Dr. Jim Gilchrist, preaching (Westminster Presbyterian Church); Rev. Nikki Porter, worship leader (Eastminster Presbyterian Church) as we celebrate contributions of African American churches

II. Welcome, Moderator's Greetings & Introductions

Introducing visitors and welcoming pastors in new positions

III. Who We Are & Presbytery Matters for Today

Installation of 2018 Presbytery Officers

Adoption of the Docket

Intention to Introduce New Business

East Branch Report – Rev. Dr. Beverly James

International Partnership Ministry Team Report

Update on Malawi Partnership (Mosaic Comm. & St. Michael & All Angels, Blantyre)

Request for Concurrence on Shenango Presbytery South Sudan Overture

IV. Hearing from Our Ministry Teams & Committees

Adoption of the Consent Agenda

Executive Committee Report

Referred Motion for Change in Remittance of *Per Capita* to General Assembly

Commission on Preparation for Ministry Report

Commission on Ministry Report

V. Looking Ahead to the Future

General Minister's Report – State of the Presbytery 2018

Nominating Committee Report

Stated Clerk's Report

New Business

VI. Going Forth by God's Grace

Report from Roll Clerk & Words of Thanks

Closing Prayer