



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

May 2018

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

“Change.” It’s not a four-letter word, but it often elicits a visceral response among us. We all want change for the better in our outcomes – increased worship attendance, giving, mission outreach, more young families, and so on – but we struggle to embrace substantive changes in how we conduct our worship and mission. We hope that if we keep doing what we’re doing, maybe just doing it for a little while longer or a little bit better will be enough to change outcomes. Dream on.

In his influential book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Ronald Heifetz observes that every social organization “is the way it is because people in that system (at least those individuals and factions with the most leverage) want it that way. ...Enough important people like the situation exactly as it is, whatever they may say about it, or it would not be the way it is.” People with the greatest stake have the most to lose if things get changed, and therefore are most likely to resist any real changes, no matter how difficult the status quo may be.

Against this backdrop, I invite us to reflect on the decision of our ecclesiastical committee to make substantial changes to this presbytery meeting. It will have a different order, with worship being woven into the whole of the meeting rather than standing on its own at the beginning. Our docket looks more like a worship bulletin and less like a corporate business agenda. There will be no preacher, but several voices pointing us to the Word of God. We will be meeting at a different time and will share a meal, both of which we have done only for our fall meeting at Crestfield.

Predictably enough, these changes have made our preparations for this meeting rather bumpy. Our meeting planning machinery has had several hiccups along the way. Preparation of this letter, which I write for every presbytery meeting, disappeared from my radar, and I had to scramble at the last minute to put it together. How much smoother it would be just to do things as we’ve always done them! Who cares that our presbytery meeting attendance has been in steady decline for more than 20 years?

We all should care. And so we’re shaking things up. Relax, it’s just this once. Just an experiment. Unless ... things go so well that we can’t simply return to our old ways. If you’re interested in seeing presbytery meetings change, the best way to express that interest is to come to this meeting.

I have found two blockades to change in the church equally pervasive and pernicious. The first is the familiar refrain, “We’ve never done it that way before.” Its counterpart is no less deadly, “Been there, done that. Didn’t work then, won’t work now.” How self-serving. How cynical. How tragic.

Beloved, we are in the season of Easter, celebrating a God who disrupts everything by bringing new life to the dead. Where is Easter happening in our churches? In our presbytery? In our own lives?

In Easter hope,

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

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.

Stated Meeting of the Pittsburgh Presbytery

May 3, 2018 – 4:00 p.m.

Glenshaw Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Trent Hancock (Moderator); Rev. Steven Werth (Sr. 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

PRESBYTERY MEETING DOCKET

Just as the mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church, it is our sincere desire that the gatherings of Pittsburgh Presbytery also reflect the mission of God in Christ through the shape and substance of our meetings. Our daily lives and our gathered lives are times to glorify and enjoy God as a worshipful, covenant community. In that Spirit, this month's meeting will incorporate a spirit of Christian worship throughout the docket, with a special emphasis given to the Great Ends of the Church. (see F-1.01 and F-1.0304)

1. **Call to Order, Moderator's Greeting & Call to Worship** **4:00 p.m.**
 - Opening Prayer
 - "Setting the Stage" for our Meeting Together
 - *Hymn of Praise

2. **Introduction to Great Ends of the Church: Maintenance of Divine Worship**
 - Scripture Reading
 - Adoption of Docket
 - Announcement of Intention to Introduce New Business

3. **Conversation on Great Ends of the Church: Shelter, Nurture, & Spiritual Fellowship of the Children of God**
 - Prayer of Confession and Assurance of God's Pardon
 - *Hymn/Song of Praise
 - Generosity Committee Report
 - North Branch Report: Rev. Brian Wallace

4. **Conversation on Great Ends of the Church: Promotion of Social Righteousness**
 - Scripture Reading and Meditation
 - Freedom Rising Initiative Report
 - Offering and *Doxology

Prayers of Dedication and Intercession
Lord's Prayer

5. Conversation on Great Ends of the Church: Preservation of the Truth

Affirmation of Faith
Adoption of the Consent Agenda
Executive Committee Report
General Minister's Report

Fellowship Time & Dinner

Special Order of the Day 6:00 p.m.

In deference to those who will prepare the meal, the Moderator will make every effort to break for dinner as close to 6:00 p.m. as possible. Reservations and prepayment are required for dinner.

6. Conversation on Great Ends of the Church: Proclamation of the Gospel for the Salvation of Humankind

Commission on Preparation for Ministry Report
Commission on Ministry Report
Commissioning of Commissioners to 223rd General Assembly
Prayer of Dedication

7. Conversation on Great Ends of the Church: Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World

Stated Clerk's Report
Nominating Committee Report
New Business
Report from Roll Clerk and Words of Thanks
*Closing Prayer and Benediction