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December 2018

Brothers and Sisters,

I have just completed my ninth year in service as your General Minister. At the presbytery meeting on December 3, 2009 you (well, all of you but one) elected me to serve in this office. I fear that soon I will no longer be able to enjoy the extra grace that comes with being your "new" presbytery leader. The first congregation I served in Appalachia was wonderfully gracious to me in countless ways, yet they made it clear that it would take twenty years or more for me no longer to be a "newbie."

Pittsburgh still feels to me like a new ministry field in so many ways. Unprecedented situations keep cascading around us. We have been traveling uncharted paths in recent weeks, reeling in the aftermath of the wanton massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue. Our community has joined hearts and hands across religious and ethnic lines to support the bereaved. More acutely than ever we know how present hatred remains in our world, and how urgently we must stand together against its venomous spread.

This all has unfolded against the backdrop of this year's fiftieth-anniversary celebration of "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood." The Rev. Fred Rogers' life and words powerfully bear witness to an alternative way of dealing with those who are different from us. The dissonance involved in simultaneously celebrating Mr. Rogers and grieving with the Tree of Life community is almost beyond our capacity to hold.

I have discovered that many people in our presbytery had direct connections and friendships with victims of the October 27 massacre. They were not some nameless abstract group, but people we knew and loved, and whose loss we grieve greatly: Joyce Fienberg, Richard Gottfried, Rose Mallinger, Jerry Rabinowitz, Cecil Rosenthal, David Rosenthal, Bernice and Sylvan Simon, Daniel Stein, Melvin Wax, Irving Younger. I am grateful beyond words for each of you who have stood up for each and all of these dear people and their loved ones, in whichever way the Spirit has led you.

During this holiday season, who are we being called specifically to include by name in our outreach? Giving to general relief is wonderful; by all means, let's keep doing it. Yet, whom do we know by name to whom we can reach out and express our love and concern? May we learn from this horrible tragedy at least this: Waiting until calamity strikes to reach out to friends beyond our regular routine is waiting too long.

I don't know what challenges and opportunities you and I will encounter in our tenth year together. But whatever they may be, I'm grateful that God has put me in a place to engage them in company with you.

Blessings on your holidays,

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

Sheldon 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 Presbytery of Pittsburgh

December 6, 2018 – 1:00 p.m.

Ken Mawr United 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

Gathering for Worship and Work of the Presbytery in the Season of Advent

Welcome, Moderator's Greetings & Introductions. Visitors and first-time commissioners will be introduced, and corresponding members will be accepted. Pastors in new calls will be announced and those new to the presbytery will be welcomed.

Adoption of the Docket and Consent Agenda and Announcement of the Intention to Introduce New Business

I. Advent Hope

Call to Worship & Candle-Lighting by Rev. Dr. Sheldon Sorge

Hymn

Scripture Reading & Meditation

Freedom Rising Report

Stated Clerk's Report

Vote on Proposed Constitutional Amendments 18 A, B.1, B.2, C, and F

Commission on Preparation for Ministry Report

II. Advent Peace

Scripture Reading & Candle-Lighting by Rev. Gavin Walton

Confession of Sin & Assurance of Pardon

Hymn

Branch Report – South Branch

Report of the Peacemaking Ministry Team

Commission on Ministry Report

III. Advent Joy

Scripture Reading & Candle-Lighting by Rev. Rebecca DePoe

Words of Reflection

Call to Offering and Offering

Hymn

Prayer of Thanksgiving by Rev. Paula Cooper, Regional Liaison for East Central Africa

Executive Committee Report

Approval of 2019 Terms of Call for Staff

Committee on Nominations Report

IV. Advent Love

Scripture Reading & Candle-Lighting by Commissioned Pastor C. Louise Schoppe

Litany

General Minister's Report

New Business

Going Forth by God's Grace to Serve During the Season of Advent

Report from the Roll Clerk, Words of Thanks and Closing Prayer