

May 2019

Sisters and brothers,

The first gathering of baptized Jesus-followers is recorded in Acts 2. Peter preaches the message of salvation through Jesus to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost, and we are told that three thousand of his hearers become believers. They are immediately baptized, and a church is born, without the benefit of the New Testament (let alone the *Book of Order*) to help them structure their life together.

All they have to go on are their instincts, formed by their new DNA as baptized followers of Jesus. And this instinct leads them to establish immediately the four pillars of church life: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. (Acts 2:42) These prove to be indelible markers of the Christian church.

It did not take long for the apostles' teachings to be compiled into writings that circulated around the church and eventually were canonized. Rules of church order were also soon established. How these markers got lived out varied from place to place, but they are all present in descriptions of Christian gatherings during the first and second centuries.

These four pillars are not the only things that mark the church's life. We also conduct necessary administrative business, we collect funding for church mission, we sing the songs of Zion, we commission people for Christian service, and so much more. Yet the four pillars remain as anchors of the church's life in every time and place.

When we meet as a presbytery, are we meeting as a business organization or as a church? If the meeting of presbytery is essentially no different from a meeting of company stockholders, we lose much. Presbytery is the regional expression of *the church*, and as such its meetings should be first of all marked by the church's DNA, which is still anchored by the four pillars of teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.

Once upon a time our presbytery's meetings always included breaking bread together. We abandoned that practice years ago because it took too much time and trouble for people as busy as we were. In so doing, we lost something of what it means to be "church" together. I recently asked a gathering of presbytery executives which of their presbyteries were experiencing a revitalization in their presbytery meetings, and if so, what did their meetings look like. Every one of those who reported revitalized presbytery meetings included all four pillars as necessary parts of every meeting.

This presbytery meeting we will be breaking bread together, something we have done only sporadically in recent years. Whenever we do so, good things happen. I believe good things will happen at this coming gathering as we gather at table, enjoy fellowship, hear apostolic teaching, and offer ourselves together to our Lord in prayer. See you at dinner!



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 Presbytery of Pittsburgh

May 23, 2019 – 4:00 p.m.

Hampton United Presbyterian Church
Rev. Steven Werth, Moderator, Presiding

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 the Work of the Presbytery

Welcome from the Moderator, Greetings from our Host, Introductions and Announcement of New Calls

Greetings from Rev. Dr. Graham Standish, Director of Samaritan Counseling Center.

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

Hearing the Word

Gathering Hymn and Scripture Reading

Meditation by Rev. Dr. Sheldon Sorge

Who We Are & Presbytery Matters for Today

Executive Committee Report

Commission on Preparation for Ministry Report

Commission on Ministry Report

Committee on Nominations Report

Stated Clerk's Report

Who We Are Becoming Part I

Freedom Rising Report

New Models in New Worshipping Communities

New Models Emerging in Established Congregations

Introduction to Directed Table Conversations

Dinner and Directed Conversation

Special Order of the Day 5:30 p.m.

We will adjourn to Fellowship Hall for the meal before returning to the Sanctuary for the conclusion of the meeting. In deference to those who will prepare the meal, the Moderator will make every effort to break for dinner as close to 5:30 p.m. as possible. Reservations and prepayment are required for dinner.

Responding to the Word with Praise and Prayer

We will collect an offering to benefit the Hunger Fund and the Lazarus Fund and the Chancel Choir of Hampton United Presbyterian Church will present an anthem.

Who We Are Becoming Part II

Report on Foundation of Hope

General Minister's Report – Introduction of New Director of Justice Ministries

Report on Directed Table Conversations

Going Forth by God's Grace to Serve

New Business

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