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February 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

By mandate of our Presbytery Manual, “Black History Month shall be celebrated annually at the stated meeting of Presbytery in February.” Some mandates merely bind us, while others also bless us. This is surely one of the latter.

I am blessed by participating in some great Gospel music in the African American tradition at our presbytery meeting. I spent a few years playing piano for an African American Pentecostal congregation (which helps explain why I play the way I do!). This music always nourishes my soul, and I am so grateful that our Presbytery Manual assures that I will be granted such a blessing at least once each year.

We all are blessed to hear the stories and the preaching that emanate from our African American church heritage. That heritage has always stirred up the church to stay true to its calling as a champion of both justice *and* evangelism. It has drawn us back time and again to remember that they are inseparable in the Gospel. Without its abiding witness among us, we would be far more easily divided between “justice-Christians” and “evangelism-Christians.”

While I count our Manual mandate to celebrate Black History month a blessing, it also troubles me that we need a mandate to make sure we do so.

The positive side of making this a mandate is that it demonstrates a commitment that runs deep enough in our DNA that we know we must ever cultivate it. We celebrate Black History Month because we believe that knowing and honoring our African American heritage is critically important to our identity as God’s people.

Making this a mandate is also an act of confession. We confess that we need a mandate to assure that we continue something so vitally important, because without so binding ourselves we may let this commitment slide.

We make promises to express our deepest values, and we make promises to assure that we don’t abandon them, especially when it gets tough to stay true to them. What promises does your congregation make to assure that it doesn’t forget to honor and nourish our African American heritage?

Keeping the faith,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, 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

February 13, 2020 – 1:00 p.m.

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Rev. Steven Werth (Outgoing Moderator); Rev. Charissa Howe (Incoming 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 the Work of the Presbytery

Welcome from the Moderator, Greetings from our Host, Introductions and Announcement of New Calls, and Recognition of Retiring Ministers.

Introduction of New Executive Director of Crestfield Camp and Conference Center

Greetings from Kori Robbins, Young Adult Volunteer in 2018-2019

Announcements from the International Partnership

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

Worship and Celebration of the Contributions of African-American Churches

Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy (East Liberty Presbyterian Church) will preach and Rev. Nikki Porter (Eastminster Presbyterian Church) will lead music.

Attending to our Corporate and Ecclesiastical Business

Installation of 2020 Presbytery Moderators

Executive Committee Report

Stated Clerk's Report

Requests for Concurrences to 224th General Assembly

Hearing from Our Staff, Commissions, and Committees

General Minister's Report

State of the Presbytery

Report on Matthew 25 Initiative

Commission on Preparation for Ministry Report

Commission on Ministry Report

Committee on Nominations Report

Going Forth by God's Grace to Serve

New and Old Business

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