

An Open Letter to the Pastors, Leaders and Churches of Yellowstone Presbytery

These are days of great challenge and opportunity for Christ's followers and for ministry. Many of the people in the churches and communities we serve are unsettled, even anxious, angry or fearful over events and forces surging through human hearts, nature, our country and our world.

Racial tension is dramatically on the rise. The specter of war with North Korea is a possibility. The leadership of the president is being questioned at home and abroad. And, Eastern Montana is suffering the deepest drought of anywhere in the country, losing an estimated \$400 Million in crop failure this year, per a radio story on NPR on August 17.

How do we, as pastors and elders in Christ's Church, live and speak the Gospel to Christ's people and our communities in this time? How do we nurture and model the virtues that Paul calls us to – "faith, hope, and love," in these challenging days?

On the drought: The presbytery has secured a small PDA grant to be administered **with** the Jordan church. Further Kathy Goodrich spoke at length with a staff writer for the Presbyterian news service about regional conditions, challenges and being Christ's people, doing ministry in the face of this daunting challenge (2 articles forthcoming). But there is more to do to serve drought-stricken communities, more faith and hope in Christ to share and live into.

On rising racial tensions: Clearly and unequivocally, we stand against racism in all its forms. Scripture is crystal clear that *all* people are made in the image of God and to be valued (Gen. 1: 26 – 31; 9:5,6). We denounce the bigotry and hatred that fuel the white supremacy movement and its inherent injustices. But we should do so and live in a way that seeks to listen to the fears, anxieties, and concerns **of** individuals, of those who join such groups. Perhaps, God may work through us to form caring relationships with individuals in these groups, like professional musician Daryl Davis who has spent decades getting to know these individuals and whose remarkable story, *Accidental Courtesy*. The lasting changes in his new friends, former racists, is captured here:

www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/accidental-courtesy/. If we simply denounce and do not reach out with a courageous, Christ-like clarity and love, people will only go underground again and hatred will fester.

"...So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all," Rom. 12:18. We, as Christ-followers, are called and commanded to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," - Matthew 5:43-48 and 5:3-16, to be peacemakers - Matthew 5:9, and to join in Christ's work of reconciliation – II Cor. 5:14 – 21 and Eph. 2: 11-22. St. Francis also gave us a guiding prayer, "Lord, make *me* an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love..." Martin Luther King, Jr. pointed out that "Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that..."

So how are we to live faithful to our calling as pastors and elders, as Christ's disciples and communities, in these days of challenge and opportunity? A few preliminary thoughts

We PRAY: with humility and repentance, for God's ways to prevail and God's restorative and reconciling work, for leaders in ALL places and spheres of societies as we are commanded, for each other and the flocks under our care, for each of us to be willing to BE an answer to our prayers.

We share our helpful links and resources.

- a. Jody McDevitt shared that Bryan Stevenson, J.D. author of *Just Mercy*, with the Equal Justice Initiative, will be the convocation speaker at MSU in Bozeman on the evening of August 24. He is a deeply committed Christian lawyer with an important message doing strategic work. He recently spoke at a similar Whitworth University-community event. The public is welcome. He is well-worth hearing in person or else see his Ted Talk if interested.
- b. From the PCUSA Theology and Worship Unit: The Confession of 1967 clearly delineates the biblical PCUSA beliefs on the value of each human created in the image of God and on racism. We have a rich biblical and confessional heritage in the Declaration of Barmen, Heidelberg Catechism and other more recent statements in 1999, over the last few years and this week.
- c. ***What other writings, links and resources have you found helpful? Please share them with all of us by sending links, or article references, etc. to Leadership Cabinet moderator, Susi Ennis, (slennis@nemont.net) who is willing to compile them and then send them out to those interested.***

We listen, dialogue and help each other... Would any of you attend if we set aside a day of discussion and prayer to gather for a day in the fall at a central location in the presbytery? Please let Susi know.

Or is there another idea stirring in you for ways God may be calling you to live your faith and ways we may support each other in ministry through the months ahead?

We, on the staff and Leadership Cabinet, are praying God to work God's redemptive good and reconciliation as God has promised, **praying as listed above**, and for the Yellowstone churches, pastors and leaders as we seek to become more like Christ and follow Christ together into the future.

Trusting in Christ who makes all things new.

Yours in the Body of Christ,

George and Kathy Goodrich, Co-General Presbyters

Susi Ennis, Moderator and the Leadership Cabinet