



MERRY CHRISTMAS

From All of Us at That All May Freely Serve

Bearers of Hope...

A few weeks ago, I was struck by the words of Pope Francis. While, delivering a sermon at Casa Santa Maria on November 22, he said the following:

“We are close to Christmas. There will be lights, there will be parties, bright trees, even Nativity scenes, all decked out, while the world continues to wage war. It’s all a charade. The world has not understood the way of peace. The whole world is at war. A war can be justified, so to speak, with many, many reasons, but [with] all the world as it is today, at war, piecemeal though that war may be – a little here, a little there – there is no justification.

“What shall remain in the wake of this war, in the midst of which we are living now? What shall remain? Ruins, thousands of children without education, so many innocent victims, and lots of money in the pockets of arms dealers. We should ask for the grace to weep for this world, which does not recognize the path to peace. To weep for those who live for war and have the cynicism to deny it. God weeps, Jesus weeps.”

A former Roman Catholic, I left the church over its teachings around gender, women’s ordination and more. I became a Presbyterian over twenty years ago, and while I continue to have serious disagreements with the Church of Rome I am often struck by the compassion and outspokenness of the current Pope. His comment about the *charade* of Christmas struck a chord that many of us know as we face the complexities of life on this planet.

It would be easy to be overwhelmed by all that needs to be done and just walk away, giving up on creating change; this has never been our way. Instead, we believe that every step for justice and love impacts all efforts for radical hospitality. Along with creating a more just and loving denomination, this work—our work—changes the church *and* the world. It is about the relationships we build with one another, especially with those who disagree with us that calls us forward, as it always has. Some may never accept the gifts we have to offer but sooner or later Love softens even the toughest opponent.

This commitment to Justice/Love builds with each one of us in ways that have changed the PC(USA) and will continue to do so. And the changes are everywhere, from marriage equality, to how we understand our families, the ways in which we study the Bible, how we worship, the language we use and much, much more. Jesus' words have always guided us, and among them these:

“And you shall love the your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:30-31

For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ/Q) folks and our allies, this is at the core of the Good News we continue to witness to this church and all we meet.

Gatherings of Love/Justice...

In April, more than ninety leaders of our Progressive Movement from the 1970's to the present gathered at Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY for “Rock Stars and Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love.” Organized by That All May Freely Serve, we came together because many of us have been apart too long and it was time to reunite and celebrate the advances we have made, while remembering those who have brought us to these days of stunning change in our church and society. The group lifted up and renewed friendships separated by the years, introducing current leadership in the Progressive Movement and honoring saints who have gone before and continue to be a force in our lives.

During our time together, we recreated a timeline of the movement through the narratives of those in attendance, with folks sharing their memories of David Sindt, Howard Warren, Pam Byers and many others. We recorded more than 60 interviews on video of almost everyone who was at Stony Point and have been transcribing and posting them on our website at www.tams.org. And, all the fabulous pictures by Jack Hartwein-Sanchez can be enjoyed at www.tamfspics.org. Thanks, Jack! Over the next several months, all the videos and others that you offer, will to be posted as we build these archives and the record of what is yet to come.

Rock Stars & Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love



Janie Spahr, Laurene
Lafontaine, Dan Blackford



Barry Smith



Bear Ride and
Tricia Dykers-Koenig

Stony Point Center, NY
April 8-11, 2015

Photos by
Jack Hartwein-Sanchez



Group Photo of *Rock Stars and Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love*

Almost everyone listed below made it into the photo! How many can you pick out of the group?

Alice Anderson & Georgeann Wilcoxson, Susan R. Andrews, Ray Bagnuolo, Bruce Billman, Dan Blackford, Lisa Bove, Shawna Bowman, Bob Brashear, Beth Buckingham-Brown, Ralph Carter, Ted Coppock, Doris Cowan, Susan Craig & Bear Ride, Kathy Dean & Susan De George, Tricia Dykers-Koenig, Marvin Ellison, Diane Engster & Bill Yolton, Cleveland Evans, Cliff Frasier, Marie Gibson, Chris Glaser, Julie Green & Mardee Rightmyer, Susan Hartley, Jack Hartwein-Sanchez, Dick Hasbany & Craig Machado, Keith Hershberger, Ralph Jones, Elyse Bird Kitrakis, Larissa Kwong-Abazia, Laurene Lafontaine, Dwain Lee, Lisa Larges, Ryan Larkin, Winn Legerton, Susan Leo, Helene Loper, Molly McGinnis, Alex McNeill, Gerri Mead & Gail Russell, Babs Miller, Katie Morrison, Mark Palermo*, Bob Patenaude, Cheryl Pynch, Susan Quinn Bryan, Rebecca Reyes, Jean Richardson, Ronald Richwine, Jim Rigby, Carol Seaton, Byron Shafer, Elizabeth Sieber, Barry Smith, Dan Smith, Eileen Smith, Jackie & Jim Spahr, Janie Spahr, John Russell Stanger, Sharon Stuart/Tom Heitz, Erin Swenson, Sonnie Swenston-Forbes, Deanna and Jim Tiefenthal, Kitty and Rick Ufford-Chase, Mieke Vandersall, Diana Vezmar-Bailey, (a representation of) Howard Warren, Robin White, Betsy Winters, and many others who stopped by along the way. Special thanks to Rick and Kitty Ufford-Chase and the fabulous staff! www.stonypointcenter.org

*We lost Mark Palermo to a heart-attack in August of this year. It was a true blessing to be with him in April and for so many of us to meet him for the first time or to be reunited with him after many years. Barry Smith wrote a wonderful tribute to Mark which is available at www.tamfs.org, as well as the interview that Mark recorded while at the gathering.



Katie Morrison, Jean Richardson,
and Lisa Larges



Elyse Bird Kitrakis, Dan Smith,
Marvin Ellison, Erin Swenson,
Alex McNeill, and Ryan Larkin



Janie Spahr & Mark Hostetter, ally
and conference supporter.
Thanks, Mark!

See all the pictures from *Rock Stars and Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love* and more at www.tamfspics.org or follow links on our website at www.tamfs.org

Joy to the World!



Molly McGinnis



Babs Miller



Layton Williams



John Russell Stanger



Laurene Lafontaine



Pat Youngdahl



Beth Buckingham-Brown

The Sustenance of Joy...

We believe deeply in the joy that requires only to remember that we are loved by God and called to love and serve others. It is a joy that goes far beyond lightheartedness or a smile; it deeply plumbs our soul and very being. It is that which helps us continue to thrive and witness in a world of strife and a church that has too often treated us as second-class citizens or worse. It is the Joy of God's Love that has sustained us over the last forty years and upholds us now. What many will never understand is the courage of so many who were treated so badly, yet took care of each other with grace, love and joy. In the face of enormous sacrifice and constant oppression each moment of resistance and determination has brought "Joy to the World," and we pray - to all - who may read these words.

And with that same joy, we remember so many friends, such as Howard Warren, David Sindt, Mark Palermo, Ginny Davidson, Pam Byers and others who guide us from a joyful and loving place that is our promise. We are grateful to them and all those who have preceded us, and we continue to keep their memories alive in many ways, including by refusing to accept any marginalization or dehumanization or anything less than full welcome and equality for our LGBTQ/Q community and all others who know the sting of exclusion and its resident violence.

In these last amazing few years, we have been part of the ministry to remove G-6.0106b from the Book of Order, gained our pastors permission to marry all, and changed our constitutional definition of marriage to being between two people. The Presbyterian Church (USA) is among the most technically inclusive denominations on the face of the Earth! As someone on our Facebook page (/tamfs) recently said, "Let's not be shy about being an awesome denomination!" And, we are an awesome denomination in many ways, even more so now because of the message we have to carry for all to hear. Ours is a joyful powerful message of inclusion, justice and welcoming that we are charged with making sure is heard far and wide!

Nor can we accept a slow unveiling of these changes in our denomination and the world around us. It's not about pride; it's about changing the treatment of our community and an end to all the violence, while bringing support and healing to those who still suffer. That is our awesome call and witness to the world, and that is our joy.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

John 14:27



From June 18-25 of next year, we will gather in Portland, Oregon for the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). That All May Freely Serve will be there, once again, working with others to continue the work of our calls for Hope, Love, Joy, Peace and Justice in our denomination, our lives and the world.

We will again be asking our denomination to “be not afraid” and not to succumb to “troubled hearts.” All our More Light ministries are spiritual beacons in a world that has known too many shadows; shadows that give way when folks know they are loved, welcomed and beautifully created by a God beyond gender or anything else we know.

Our denomination has been painfully reserved in the progress of welcoming our Queer community in the PC(USA). Why there has been such little celebration from our leadership in signaling the great shift away from practices of exclusion and marginalization of our LGBTQ/Q family is open to speculation. The little that has been said has mostly been conciliatory and apologetic in an attempt to assuage those who have opposed us in the past and now see themselves as the marginalized.

In decent and orderly fashion, the Presbyterian Church(USA) has voted to strike down all barriers to the full inclusion and participation in all aspects of leadership for our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning community. These legislative indications of grace are themselves a call to peace and unity—but not at any cost. Delay and timidity in carrying this Good News is too great a cost.

We feel that the leadership of the PC(USA) at the national and regional levels are now charged and constitutionally required to engage in assisting and supporting the transition that’s time has come. We are ready to help in whatever ways we may. Being silent, however, is not one of those ways.

Over all the years of this struggle, it has never been the Progressive folks bringing charges against or threatening the livelihoods of those who opposed us. Still, the preceding forty years and resultant changes are not a reasons for retribution or seeking marginalization or revenge of any kind. We have held onto hope, loved those who did not love us, carried the joy of God’s love for all and sought justice and change. This continues to be the way our voices and actions will serve the PC(USA).

The path for peace that we see ahead is one that boldly enters into the world with this message of Love that heralds the Good News and the prophetic ways in which the PC(USA) membership has spoken. Until we demonstrate clear evidence of the intent and actions called for in the changes of our constitution, how might anyone believe we have entered a new time in the life of the PC(USA) and its future?

The idea held by some that the “inclusion” or “exclusion” of these changes are equal choices that can be decided from congregation to congregation based on a vote is wrong. While pastors and Sessions continue to have the say about who will be married in their sanctuaries, it is not an equal choice to marry same-gender couples or to choose not to marry them, simply because they are of the same gender.

We have moved beyond the time of even suggesting that it is a right choice to exclude LGBTQ/Q people in our denomination, and while it may take time for those who disagree to see it differently - if we do not believe that an position of exclusion wrong - we cannot speak with integrity or in a faithful way.

For this and many other reasons, in the days ahead, we will be asking Sessions to approve and send to their presbyteries an overture that calls the PC(USA) to publicly issue and apologize to the LGBTQ/Q community in the denomination for the harms done based on its teachings, practices, and use judicial courts to historically marginalize and exclude us from leadership in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Based on our current polity, for this proposal to become an overture that will be considered

at the 222nd General Assembly, at least two presbyteries have to vote to send it to the Office of the General Assembly.

If you believe that the Session of your church would consider this overture and send it on to your presbytery, please contact me as soon as possible. With this type of overture, there is a 45-day deadline, which means both the overture and at least one concurrence must be forwarded to the Office of the General Assembly by May 4, 2016.

The rationale for moving this overture is solid:

- First, there will be no chance for healing and ultimately reconciliation until this denomination admits it was wrong and makes a statement of apology to the LGBTQ/Q community. There are precedents for this, most recently in Alaska where an apology was made to the indigenous peoples for the Presbyterian missionaries who first arrived there and attempted to wipe out the native culture in favor of Christianity.
- There are many folks who have been estranged by the church because of its teachings, practices, and disciplinary actions towards ministers and others who are queer.
- Many families and communities still look to the church for teachings. The PC(USA) can have an enormous impact in ending the violence toward people who are LGBTQ/Q, providing families with a “religious” voice that speaks out against homophobia, transphobia and the many other fears that are breaking apart families and creating conditions for youth that cannot be accepted under any conditions.

- As one of the most constitutionally inclusive mainline denominations in the world, our voice has an impact beyond any borders we might imagine. Our voice of hope, love, joy, peace, justice and welcoming can help lead the way for global change and an end to the violence of marginalization toward people who are LGBTQ/Q around the world.
- Our faithful stewardship cannot be realized unless we acknowledge that the gift of the refinements in our constitution bring with them God's challenge to go forth and spread the Good News with a new life.
- The deep sense of suspicion for many is understandable, although not in alignment with where the church is today. A statement such as the one suggested would have the effect of validating our legislative actions with our commitment to change. Change, often avoided because of the associated fears and risks, all of which we need to overcome.
- Admitting the wrongs done and apologizing to those harmed moves justice in all mission areas, lifting up the entire denomination.

The theme of the 222nd General Assembly is
"The Hope in Our Calling" - Ephesians 1:18

Our mission in the PC(USA) must always reflect our deeply held hope, which can be seen day in and out by our committed staff in Louisville and across the denomination. As we live together in the "Hope of Our Calling," let us choose boldly a new Moderator and Stated Clerk with vision that leads us toward the "awesome" God who calls us forward.

Ephesians 1:15-23 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

"From the time I first heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the holy ones, I have never stopped thanking God for you and remembering you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Savior Jesus Christ, the God of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation, to bring you a rich knowledge of the Creator.

"I pray that God will enlighten the keys of your mind so you can see the hope this call holds for you—the promised glories that God's holy ones will inherit, and the infinitely great power that is exercised for us who believe. You can tell this from the strength of God's power at work in Jesus, the power used to raise Christ from the dead and to seat Christ in heaven at God's right hand, far above every sovereignty, authority, power or dominion, and above any other name that can be named—not only in this age, but also in the age to come. God has put all things under Christ's feet and made Christ, as the ruler of everything, the head of the church, and the church is Christ's body; it's the fullness of the One who fills all of creation."

May it be so...

That All May Freely Serve
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Jean Richardson, Laurene Lafontaine, Robin White, Bear Ride and Susan Craig



Marvin Ellison



Helene Loper and Beth Buckingham-Brown



Bear Ride, Molly McGinnis, Chris Glaser, Katie Morrison



Erin Swenson & Howard



Jackie Spahr, Bear Ride, Jim Spahr, Janie Spahr, Byron Shafer, Diane Engster, Keith Hershberger, Doris Cowan, Susan Quinn Bryan, Chris Glaser,



Ryan Larkin, Susan Hartley, Carol Seaton, Ray Bagnuolo, Mardee Rightmyer, Warren Cooper



Photos by Jack Hartwein-Sanchez

Return of the Stole

Diana Vezmar-Bailey

I was so pleased to make a contribution when Martha Juillerat requested that gay men, lesbians, friends and supporters, contribute liturgical stoles telling our stories of the impact of the Presbyterian church's excluding us from the practice of ministry. She asked so she would feel some support when she "came out" to her presbytery as she set aside her practice of ministry. She, like so many others, chose not to proclaim the Gospel of God's love for all creation while functioning in a system that judged her as inappropriate for ministry as a lesbian woman. Along with many others, I sent in a stole so Martha could demonstrate to her presbytery that she wasn't the Only One. On the stole, I wrote one of the sentences that had appeared in my statement to the presbytery in January of 1989: "What does it profit the church to gain its life and lose its soul?" On the other side I wrote the dates of my ordination and the date I was "relieved of the practice of ordained ministry" (Book of Order language): November 12, 1978 & January 10, 1989 respectively.

My journey following being "relieved" included a path toward recognition of my ordination by the United Church of Christ (never completed), a brief stint as the founding minister of a primarily GLBT congregation, and a search for a church that was welcoming to GLBT people and that used inclusive language—not an easy task in the '90's!

After moving to Madison, Wisconsin in 1997 with my partner of four years, I was hired as Coordinator of Member Programs at a Unitarian Universalist church. It took me a year to figure out how a church could function without common dogma. Once I figured it out, I realized that I had been a UU for a long time, I just didn't know it! Leslie and I joined a UU congregation in 1998 and have maintained our UU connection to the present day.

I looked into having my ordination recognized by the Unitarian Universalist Association. It would have been a lot of work! So I pondered what I really wanted to do with my life. I wanted to facilitate spirituality groups. I wanted to write. Since neither of those things required ordination, I moved on.



With my retirement, Leslie and I moved to the Pacific Northwest and became members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Corvallis in 2006. I took a year off to settle into life as a retired person. Gradually I moved into volunteering at the Fellowship, as well as a local organization working with women who experience sexual and/or domestic violence. I also began developing Opening Pathways, my practice as a spiritual guide/companion. Over the years, as I preached occasionally, facilitated spirituality groups, and taught adult Religious Exploration classes, the congregation began to honor my ministry.

When I was invited to participate in the Rock Stars and Prophets event at Stony Point, it took me about three minutes to sign up! I found out that Babs Miller had worked hard to bring some stoles from the Stole Project to the gathering. I was pleased to find my stole among them. Our time together was bursting with stories—stories of the history of our movement in the Presbyterian church, stories to catch up with old friends, stories shared with new friends, stories about those who had died. We shared through singing, laughing, crying, celebrating, praying, grieving. Among others, I told stories of how the Unitarian Universalists at the UU Fellowship of Corvallis had come to honor my ministry among them.

Imagine my surprise and delight when Babs invited me to join her up front during the closing worship. She presented me with my stole. Two days later, during joys & sorrows I told my home congregation the story of being reunited with my stole because they have honored my ministry. They cheered! As I put the stole on, I felt remarkably blessed that it (and I) had come full circle.



The Work of That All May Freely Serve

We are grateful to all who have continued to support us in prayer, hospitality and financial gifts, when possible.

In 2015, we advanced the work to return That All may Freely Serve to a grass roots movement, engaging folks around the country as part of a network for chaplaincy and pastoral care.

Our gathering in April of Rock Stars and Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love helped greatly in bringing together national leaders from around the country, with whom we continue our work and goal of making sure that folks are never alone, as we move forward in the transitions of church and society.

As our network grows, travel continues as needed, with a greater focus on the use of social media and networking to provide information and support.

That All May Freely Serve has also taken an active and considerable role in creating archives for the Progressive Movement, beginning with intensive work of editing and transcribing more than 60 video interviews from the aforementioned conference. This work will take several months and is just the beginning of the project.

We are committed to collaboration and leadership within the Progressive community, and we have intentionally established goals for the ongoing ministry of embracing “hearts and minds” in educating and advocating for the implementation of the recent changes in our constitution. An example of this work is in the overture designed to reach out boldly as the inclusive denomination we are called to be.

There is a great deal of work that continues on a pastoral level in conversations, visits and support of folks around the country, much of which takes place over the phone and through social media and through referrals to contacts in the area of those seeking support or help.

We are a validated ministry of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley, Rochester, NY and as a member of the presbytery, I serve on the Committee on Ministry and its Executive Team.

We are grateful to the ongoing support of Downtown United Presbyterian Church in Rochester, NY for financial oversight and funds management, and we give thanks to Jim Rees, our tireless volunteer, longtime friend and manager of giving.

Highlights of 2015

- Member of Presbytery of Genesee Valley
- Serve on the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley
- National Pastoral Care
- Continued development of National Chaplaincy Network
- Planning, development and implementation of Rock Stars & Prophets Conference
- Participation in ordinations and installations of LGBTQ/Q candidates and ministers; photography for archives.
- Travel to Michigan, Florida, Georgia, Washington, D.C., Alabama, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Connecticut and local regions for evangelism.
- Participation in Synod of the Northeast “Gathering at the Table.”
- Collaboration with Progressive Groups in the PC(USA) and their national conferences.
- Managing and writing media outlets including blogs and websites and newsletters.
- Advisory Board of Stony Point Center
- Active Member of the Unity with Diversity Group
- Preaching engagements
- Editing and Transcribing of Video Interviews for Archiving

That All May Freely Serve - OperationsThat All May Freely Serve

Rev. Ray Bagnuolo, Chaplain and Minister Director
 Rev. Dr. Jane Adams Spahr, Evangelist Emerita
 Sonnie Swenston-Forbes, Chaplain
 Jim Rees, Manager of Giving and Year-End Summaries

Downtown United Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Pat Youngdahl, Pastor
 Mr. Ed Saphar, Director and Liaison to the Church and Justice
 Mr. Dave Mear, Accounting Manager
 Ms. Teresa Ward, Accounting

That All May Freely Serve Budget

2016 Budget	\$50,000
All funds as of 12/15/2015	\$12,500
Need to raise	\$37,500

Items:

Stipends - All: \$14,000
 Chaplain/Minister Director; Evangelist Emerita,
 and other support as needed

<u>Other:</u>	<u>\$36,000</u>
Postage and Mailings	\$ 1,500
Website and Media Advertising	\$ 1,500
Office Supplies & Equipment	\$ 1,500
Travel Expenses Outreach	\$24,000
General Assembly, Portland, OR	\$ 7,500

[Please scan this QR Code for online giving](#)



Or click here: <http://bit.ly/1m8jWAg>

Mailing in your gift? Please make your check payable to:
 THAT ALL MAY FREELY SERVE and send to
 Ray Bagnuolo, TAMFS
 PO Box 1262
 White Plains, NY 10602-1262
 Thank you!



*About Giving to
 That All May Freely Serve*

Dear Friends,

The way I see it is that money is like the tide; sometimes it's in and sometimes it's out. We really appreciate and need your gifts, but we understand when the *timing* is just not right.

We really mean it when we say that we are especially grateful for your prayers, your good thoughts, and the work you do in your lives - every day - to make this world more loving, just, and welcoming.

So, if you can make a donation - thank you! If you have already pledged - thank you, again. And if you can use the online giving - it's as easy as it gets!

Whatever you choose, please drop us a little note. Let us know how you are, news you'd like to share, what you would like us to pray for that is in your hearts and ideas for this ministry. Together, we are part of this community in a real way, and for that and more I am very grateful!

Peace, Ray

ray@tamfs.org

**South Presbyterian Church, Rochester New York:
A Healing Overture: Admission of, and Apology for, Harms Done to the LGBTQ/Q Members
of the Presbyterian Church(USA), Family and Friends**

December 15, 2105

Dear Friends,

In a letter to her congregation in early September, Diana Bell, Associate Pastor for Families & Children at First Presbyterian Church of San Anselmo, California came out publicly to her congregation. In her letter, she said the following about her use of the word *queer* to describe herself. I share this with Diana's permission. I ask that you consider Diana's courage and her words when you see *queer* used in the overture or elsewhere in describing ourselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning. From Diana:

"I am at the anniversary of an almost ten year struggle with accepting myself as "not straight" and I am pleased to finally not feel shame in claiming my truth. If you find the need to describe me with a label, I would prefer the term queer to lesbian or gay. It is my experience as part of a younger generation of queer people that the labels LGBT, which were and can still be useful and important for many, are now - for me - limiting and mired in politics and assumptions. Queer is a word that is being reclaimed to suggest a broad understanding of gender and sexual identities. I find comfort and power in the term because it is a way of resisting trying to fit into boxes/labels that do not fit. I guess I prefer my labels the way I prefer my God language: expansive and inclusive."

Thank you, Diana.

Please see the draft for this overture on the following pages. Check back at www.tamfs.org or contact ray@tamfs.org for updates or any questions you might have.

Peace,

Ray

A couple of notes:

- [On December 14, 2015, the Session of South Presbyterian Church unanimously approved this overture for consideration by the Presbytery of Genesee Valley!](#) We ask that you please consider this for your Session and Presbytery, as well. The body of the overture needs to remain the same, however the rationale can be changed and, if passed, still be considered a concurrence. A different "body section" would be considered a different overture and require a concurrence of its own.
- Additionally, since a Synod that approves an overture does not need a concurrence, we welcome this being proposed on a Synod level. Such a measure would assure that this overture or one like it would be on the docket for the 222nd General Assembly.
- You can download the A Healing Overture from South Presbyterian Church at www.tamfs.org

**South Presbyterian Church, Rochester New York:
A Healing Overture: Admission of, and Apology for, Harms Done to the LGBTQ/Q
Members of the Presbyterian Church(USA), Family and Friends**

The Presbytery [or Synod] of _____ overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to:

The Session of South Presbyterian Church, Rochester, New York calls for the Presbytery of Genesee Valley to overture the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to:

Affirm and witness these truths:

- we come to understand forgiveness, healing, mercy and reconciliation by God's actions through Jesus Christ's teachings and the Risen Christ in our midst;
- we are reconciled to God and one another by the forgiveness of our acts of sinfulness, through the Christ who is our peace and who breaks down the walls of hostility and division;
- further, we understand that ours is a faith and ministry of forgiveness, healing, mercy and reconciliation that requires admission of the harms we have done to one another;
- and that the fullness of our new life in Christ calls for a unity of Spirit, a sharing of gifts, and a valuing of all parts of the Body of Christ in the spirit of true forgiveness.

And we confess that our actions have fallen short of these truths in the marginalization of our sisters and brothers who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ/Q), admitting:

- that harms have been done to this community by the denomination's participation in the creation of barriers to God's call to our sisters and brothers, based solely on their gender identity;
- that charges have been instigated with the intention of preventing qualified individuals called by God to serve based on their gender identity;
- that the Constitution of the PC(USA) has been erroneously used to support these charges, resulting in the use of the denomination's court system, in effect, being co-opted to discipline others for their gender identity; and
- that the denomination has participated in or been silent about challenging the destruction of the careers of faithful servants who identified as LGBTQ/Q.

Therefore, we direct that the Presbyterian Church (USA) consider this overture to:

- admit that it has been wrong in the way it has treated the Queer Community in the PC(USA);
- apologize for the teachings and actions that have created marginalization of our sisters and brothers, while by the same adding to the erroneous belief that people who identify as LGBTQ/Q should be considered unworthy to serve fully or be honored as family within and without the church;
- acknowledge that during this struggle we have often treated one another, regardless of our identity, in ways that did not reflect the presence of the Risen Christ in our midst; and that
- state publicly that the PC(USA), as a denomination, makes this statement as an act of forgiveness, healing, mercy and reconciliation. Further, that this admission and apology lifts up the constitutional changes that have been duly implemented to dismantle the lines that have divided us from one another and the ways in which we have been called to serve, including but not limited to Amendment 10-A; the Authoritative Interpretation on Marriage, and Amendment 14F.

Rationale:

There will be no chance for healing and ultimately reconciliation until the PC(USA) admits it was wrong and makes a statement of apology. There are many faithful sisters and brothers who have been estranged by the church because of its teachings, practices, and disciplinary actions towards ministers and others who identify as LGBTQ/Q. A statement such as the one suggested would have the affect of validating our legislative actions with our commitment to changing what has been exclusionary and wrong.

As one of the most constitutionally inclusive mainline denominations in the world, our voice has an impact beyond any borders we might imagine. Our voice of hope, love, joy, peace, justice and welcoming—the Good News—leads the way for global change and a beginning to the end to the violence of marginalization and discrimination around the world.

Calling the church to admit harms done and apologize to those it has wronged has an impact beyond the LGBTQ/Q community. All justice work is about our relationship with each other in this world. Any movement of an honest statement of apology and affirmation of our determination to herald the changes we have been called to make lifts up the entire denomination in a way that reaffirms who and whose we are. We are struggling to be who we are, in part, because we have yet to have the courage to speak out loud our convictions to be the Church of Jesus Christ in the world in ways that understand the risks God calls us to take and the resultant fear about which we need not be concerned. This is the hope in our calling: to be not afraid and to love one another as God loves us.

The theme of the 222nd General Assembly is The Hope in Our Calling - Ephesians 1:18

May it be so!



You can download this annual letter and the overture at
www.tamfs.org

