

Learning from the Past...

Living in the Present...

Looking to the Future!

Elona & Gregory



224TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY *Together for Co-Moderators*

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This Is Us

Teaching Elder Gregory J. Bentley and Ruling Elder Elona Street-Stewart stand together as candidates for Co-Moderators of the 224th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Gregory Bentley is pastor of Fellowship Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama, and is endorsed by the Presbytery of North Alabama. Street-Stewart is synod executive for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and is endorsed by the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area.

Street-Stewart and Bentley both cite their own heritage and the dramatic influence of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on their lives, and on those like them, as the foundation of their desire to serve the wider church with “a hope that combines faith and justice into a life of service. Our personal experiences teach so much about who we are, and they are key to building relations across the church, across our differences, across our experiences through the hope of the Matthew 25 initiative,” Street-Stewart observed. “We believe it will take all that we are, individually and collectively, to continue to take on the important work God has for the PCUSA to do.”

“I am very excited about partnering with Elona,” Bentley said. “Together, we embody both the pain of our collective past and the possibilities of a preferred

future...a future of vitality and fruitfulness in the church. God is doing a new thing in the PCUSA and I am grateful to be a part of it.” Adds Street-Stewart, “What we talk about in the church today, what challenges us in society today, are not just issues, but people and relationships. Our opportunity today is to personify what the gospel is about, for all the people it is about.”

For both Street-Stewart and Bentley, that includes a deep embrace of the church’s Matthew 25 initiative. In approaching the cultural-geographic-political differences across diverse communities, the two ask, how might we better recognize the diversity and mutuality of gifts around us? “We live in a world house,” Bentley says, to which Street-Stewart adds, “We’re woven together, interdependent, our lives and futures tied to one another, across the generations into the future.”

The personal stories of Bentley and Street-Stewart have shaped the inclusive message they will bring to the role of co-moderator. “God has used the Presbyterian Church in a mighty way to mold and shape me into the person God created and called me to be,” Bentley recalls. “At a time when the state of Alabama was only required to provide for schooling up to the fifth grade, my maternal grandmother, Virginia B. Howze, was able to finish high school because of a mission school founded by the (then-) Northern Church. My mother, Juanita B. Hattaway graduated from the only Historically Black College founded by the (then-) Southern Church, Stillman College, of which I am an alum as well. It was the PCUSA that taught me how to blend head and heart, to nurture the ‘learning and the burning.’”

Street-Stewart is a descendant of the Delaware Nanticoke tribe, whose ancestral home was just across the Chesapeake Bay from the convention center in which the 224th General Assembly was to be held. “Even before becoming Presbyterian, this church nurtured me, welcomed me, educated me and encouraged my voice. It is through these decades of service that my voice, and with me the voices of ‘All my Relations,’ emerged to speak from truths often overlooked. Gregory and I represent the people who have been a part of this church from the beginning—but often not in roles that have allowed them to bring their full selves.” If elected with Bentley, Street-Stewart would be the first Native American moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In Native American heritage, the river that connects and binds this country together—the Mississippi—is sacred and life-giving. In African heritage, the Sankofa bird looks back to see forward, symbolic of the wisdom in learning from the past to ensure a strong future. Together, profoundly shaped by their own forebears and profoundly committed to the future of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Street-Stewart and Bentley embody an understanding of what will shape this church toward a flourishing and vibrant future.





Friends of Elona for Saint Paul Board of Education



The new Synod Executive with Rev. David Maghakian & Rev. Risley Prakasim

Community Advocacy

- Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability strategies
- Economic empowerment and housing zones
- Led community agencies and state-district collaborations

Employment

- Children’s Initiative Developer of 9 Family Centers and their governing boards
- Mentor to parents and community leaders on juvenile justice, gender/race equity, environmental advocacy, government relations and public policies
- Synod administrative support for Dakota Presbytery
- Associate for Racial Ethnic Ministry: 1994-2015
- Executive for Synod of Lakes and Prairies: 2015 - present

Awards and Recognitions

- MN Indian Education Parent of the Year
- Selected presenter to Laura Bush’s Helping America’s Youth Initiative
- Named one of top 10 school board members, Council on Urban Boards of Education
- National Racial Equity Community Empowerment Award, Pacific Education Group
- Governor’s MLK award for racial justice and Spirit of Gandhi Pathway to Nonviolence
- Woman of Faith Award [2010], Presbyterian Women, PCUSA
- 2018 Alumni Seal Award for Professional Achievement, Occidental College

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3U1JH36i-SM



Elona and Ralph Scissons, Fern Cloud, and Irvin Porter

Elona Street-Stewart

Origins

- Born and raised in Philadelphia, PA
- Member of the Delaware – Nanticoke Tribe
- Married 46 years to Rev. H. David Stewart
- 4 Adult children, 4 grandchildren, 3 grand-dogs
- Lived in Los Angeles and Richmond, CA; Pendleton, OR
- Resident of Saint Paul, MN for 35 years

Education

- Early generation Upward Bound student, Swarthmore College
- Graduate of Occidental College, Los Angeles, BA - Anthropology

Church Involvement

- Ordained Ruling Elder, First Presbyterian, Pendleton, OR – 1982
- Member, Deacon, Elder at Faith PC, Oakland; Dayton Avenue and New Life PC, St. Paul
- Attended all but four General Assemblies since 1981 as corresponding member, committee resource or commissioner
- Various service in Eastern Oregon Presbytery and Synod of the Pacific, Twin Cities Area Presbytery and Synod

of Lakes and Prairies

- Past and current elected service on Council on Church and Race, Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns, national racial ethnic caucuses, Committee on Relocation of GA agencies after Reunion, Presbyterian Women, Committee on Representation, Self-Development of People [40 yrs], Mission Priorities, Native American Coordinating Council
- Recent term as ecumenical liaison to Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
- Led Synod of Lakes and Prairies to become first Matthew 25 synod in PCUSA
- Engaged in restructuring of several councils of churches and interfaith partnerships

Educational Advocacy

- First Native American elected to urban school board in MN: St. Paul Board 2001- 2013
- MN School Board Assoc., National American Indian/Alaskan Native School Board Assoc.
- State and national presenter on Indian Education, Early Education, Family Support, Language Preservation and College Readiness

Gregory Bentley

Family

- Married to Diann Bentley with two daughters, Miriam and Johari

Education

- Graduate of Stillman College, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, major in Biology and minor in Chemistry; the only HBCU (Historically Black College and University) founded by the Southern Church
- Graduate of the Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Master of Divinity, Atlanta, Georgia

Employment

- Served as a dental assistant in the United States Army Reserve
- Teacher, physical science and Biology
- Ordained in 1998 to the ministry of Word and Sacrament at the Northern Heights Presbyterian Church, Selma, Alabama

Church & Community Involvement

- Moderator of Committee on Representation and the Commission on Ministry
- Chairman of Minority Affairs for the Tuscaloosa County (Alabama) Democratic Party
- President, Huntsville chapter, Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- Life Member, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.
- Member, North Alabama School for Organizing
- Past president, National Black Presbyterian Caucus
- Pastor, Fellowship Presbyterian Church, Huntsville, Alabama



Gregory and wife Diann



Gregory and daughters Miriam and Johari



Diann, Gregory and Daughters Miriam and Johari

We Are Called

For Presbyterians, the call of God to serve is confirmed by God’s people in community. Leadership is not just an individual call, but a gift conferred and cultivated by the community.

That has truly been the case, for Elona and Gregory, as we celebrate our roots in the collective spiritual fortitude of our communities of origin – Native American and African American.

Neither of us considered the possibility of running for the office of Moderator of General Assembly prior to the insistence of colleagues and mentors across the PCUSA. The community brought us together, as it should be: two persons of color in such a time as this, who, through extended conversation with one another, felt the Spirit moving and saw the immediate connections in our theology, cultural heritage, and church experiences.

Only after prayerful discernment listening for the whisper of that still small voice of God could we step forward to be considered for such a remarkable honor.

Together we understand this call and shared candidacy as an opportunity to bring our personal experiences and the collective experience and wisdom of our people to the task of helping the PCUSA become the best version of itself. We sincerely believe we can help to facilitate a path to a preferred future, in part through the perspective and resilience forged by our collective past. We believe God has shaped us for such a time as this to faithfully respond to and navigate the cataclysmic times in which we live: to use the best of our past as a guidepost rather than a hitching post, to guide us through this pandemic and to build solidarity with those whom Jesus called “the least of these.”



We know what we’ve been through to get here and made it by grace, persistence, curiosity, and hope. Like the Sankofa bird of our logo, we look back beyond this time of uncertainty and fear to learn from those who have gone before, even as we look forward to a faithful and fruitful future. We stand here together today to bring gifts of our people to bear upon the PCUSA being and becoming all that God has called it to be.

The ministry of the church is more important now than imagined even just two months ago. The dangers of COVID-19 are obvious, but we also believe this pandemic presents an opportunity for us to be the body of Christ in such a way as to be a compelling witness of the exhibition of the kingdom of God to the world.

We are resolute in our response to this call to serve as co-moderators to those present in the church today and for those whose participation is just beginning to unfold. As elected commissioners from the presbyteries of North Alabama and Twin Cities Area to the 224th General Assembly, we humbly seek the yet broader voice of confirmation of a shared call as co-moderators, to serve our Risen Christ and our beloved denomination.

Faithfully yours,

Elona Street-Stewart and Gregory Bentley



The theme of the 224th General Assembly (2020) was set to be “Called to a Movement Beyond Institution,” based upon Romans 12:2. In light of the pandemic, the Stated Clerk has now called for the theme to be “From Lament to Hope.” How do we help the church both lament our recent losses while also living into new hope?



ELONA SAYS:

Loss, despair, anguish, belonging will be the order of the day when the Assembly convenes and virtually connects people across the church.

Even though we will be isolated, we will not be alone. The theme expresses our frustrations and weaknesses making space to acknowledge our interdependence. When we care about people, we form trust and trust builds hope. Hope is the genuine mission of the church, a gift of purpose directed beyond ourselves toward the next generation. This 224th GA will be followed by others. We won't know who it blesses in the future, what our work means for someone else, how it may restore ministry, or repair suffering. The pandemic has changed lives so much in the last few months. We cry, 'How long O Lord' of Psalm 13, and mourn inconsolably like Rachel in Jeremiah 31:16. Right now, we feel abandoned, grieving loved ones, missing social togetherness, and yet experiencing a deeper connection to each other, to the church and to God.

Our lament acknowledges our meeting in a world full of pain, death and injustice. Our lament also reflects our humanity in an infected world and an invocation for God to intervene with righteous repair. When we lament, we grieve what is true: the hard truth of our humanity and separation from God. We were created to live with God in a garden, yet the entire human story has been about separation, and our attempts to belong again. We

acutely face what Walter Brueggemann calls a 'fearful future accompanied by a faithful God.'

When we call the church to lament, we engage in the real despair and healing of injustice. Rachel's inconsolable weeping is the heart wrenching tragedy of her lost children, removed from the land, erased from shared history, and distressed over an entire nation facing extermination. A story of lament so powerful that God comes to repair the historical trauma of broken people in a violent world, to a nation so needing a promise of hope. God says wipe your tears, for those you mourn, those who have been kidnapped, trafficked, imprisoned, brutalized, or enslaved.

HOPE IS THE GENUINE MISSION OF THE CHURCH, A GIFT OF PURPOSE DIRECTED BEYOND OURSELVES TOWARD THE NEXT GENERATION.

God speaks over chaos, anger, pain and fatigue calling for reparations of wounds suffered across generations, a call for healing the oppression of people and exploitation of land. God reminds us the church could have interrupted the complicity of injustice and exploitation in our national history. God compels us to

recognize the invisible but real costs of institutional privilege. 'I will reward you AND your children will come back home in the healing of the nation.'

Our generation and the next are urged to imagine, after the labor of waiting, relentless uncertainty, and formidable loss, that hope prevails in Jesus, who promised to remember us and restore the KINdom of God. Hope may be buried beneath this pandemic's health and safety guidelines in the virtual General Assembly distancing from one another. Only in the spiritual solidarity of truth-telling about the brokenness of our communities, understanding the real fear of loss and pain deep in the core of our humanity, can we help the church proclaim hope, the restoration offered in Christ.





GREGORY SAYS:

Lament is acknowledgement of the loss of someone and/or something that is precious to us. We recognize that injury and woundedness has occurred as well

as the need for restoration and repair. Not only do we need to lament recent loses, there are ancient and enduring losses that haunt us that need to be lamented as well. The very founding of our nation generated grievously injurious conditions for which we have not adequately and appropriately lamented (and repented) such as the genocide of First Nations people and the theft of their land and the enslavement of Africans. So yes, we must properly lament recent and not so recent losses...not either/or but both/and.

Dr. Carolyn McCrary, professor of pastoral care and counseling at the Interdenominational Theological Center contends that as African Americans, given our experience in this land, that hope is the only thing that has kept us sane in the midst of insanity. Lament and hope must be held in creative tension in that while we lament, we summon the courage to agree and cooperate with God to bring about the conditions that promote healing, wholeness, and well-being. We survey the contemporary landscape of our existence to locate the places of injury and woundedness that continue to plague our people. And hope begins to well up as we heed the words of Isaiah 58:7 to share our food with the hungry and to provide shelter for the homeless, to clothe the naked and to not turn away from our own flesh and blood.

Jesus of Nazareth expanded and amplified this notion in Matthew 25 when the sheep replied, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my sisters and brothers, you did it to me."



LAMENT AND HOPE MUST BE HELD IN CREATIVE TENSION IN THAT WHILE WE LAMENT, WE SUMMON THE COURAGE TO AGREE AND COOPERATE WITH GOD TO BRING ABOUT THE CONDITIONS THAT PROMOTE HEALING, WHOLENESS, AND WELL-BEING.



The Standing Rules state that, “During the period between assemblies, the Moderator [or Moderators] serves as an ambassador of the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace, telling the story of the church’s life and upholding the people of God through prayer” (*Manual of the General Assembly, Standing Rule H.1.a.(5)*). Reflect on the importance of that role to the church and how you would live that out as a Moderator or Co-moderator.



GREGORY SAYS:

1 Timothy 4:12 admonishes us to set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. As co-moderators, Elona and I believe it is a perfect platform to live out the

cooperation, communication, and collaboration between ruling elders and teaching elders that is articulated in our polity. We aim to demonstrate in how we relate to one another what a healthy and fruitful relationship between Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders can look like in every council of the church from session to presbytery to synod to general assembly.

Also, we want to be a source of encouragement and inspiration for the body to remind us that God is still with us and is calling us to join God in God’s redemptive and transformative work in the world. To remind the church that if we want to save our lives, we have to give them up for Christ’s sake.

Although institutional maintenance and management is critical for effective ministry, we cannot let our investment in the well-being of the institution supersede our investment in promoting the rule and reign of God. Sometimes we must be reminded that unless a head of grain falls to the earth and dies, it, and we, cannot bear fruit.



ELONA SAYS:

As Co-Moderators, we will always recognize the relationship that endures between Indigenous people and their traditional land wherever we travel.

Additionally, we will acknowledge and give honor to the gifts and ministries of former moderators elected to this office. Collectively, they embodied the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. Through times of celebration, distress, reunion, relocation, and rightsizing, they visited small and large churches, countless meetings, numerous potlucks, lifted up prayers for the people and shared amazing stories of grace and gratitude.

Together, rooted in the faith of our ancestors and profoundly committed to the future of the church, the two of us will exemplify an understanding of how much the church needs to be a place for all people. We know the hardships and challenges of being in the church, but not always included in church history. Our message will be to rekindle the gifts of God already within the church for the world to see.

GOD’S PEOPLE ARE THE INSPIRATION FOR OUR WORK IN CHURCH AND COMMUNITY AND THAT IS WHY WE SHARE THE GOOD NEWS THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE, THAT CHRIST WALKS WITH US ON THIS JOURNEY.

We recognize the Co-Moderators are called to serve in the most visible role of the church and uphold spiritual solidarity with the people of God through prayer. Right now, we pray for churches working toward the promise of Matthew 25 as they reprioritize resources, innovate worship experiences and navigate the digital divide. We know the people in our churches are strong and resilient and we will survive this crisis by adapting to what we need just as others did before us.

Each day we see the good that comes when we stand together, a ruling elder and teaching elder, modeling the foundation of fair and just representation, and highlighting equity and inclusion. We also commit to lead with cultural

humility, accepting our limitations and learning from those we meet.

We bring an inclusive message to the role of co-moderator shaped by our personal histories. Our experiences in voting rights, housing and food solutions, public witness, and community development prepared us for such a time as this, able to address the uncertainties of the immediate challenges.



The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating to individuals, families, communities, and economies and has challenged the church in numerous ways. What changes have you seen in the church during the pandemic, and what lessons might we learn? How can the church's witness be strengthened as a result of COVID-19?



ELONA SAYS: One of the notable consequences of the pandemic was the unexpected sudden disruption of our lives in this massive societal and humanitarian tragedy around the

globe. It affected all activities and personal routines and blurred any distinctions about what was 'normal.' Presbyterians and other faith communities had to rapidly mobilize safety precautions and resources and adapt to wave after wave of crisis contingencies. Due to various executive orders to shelter at home and shut down, they faced immediate challenges to communicate, congregate and coordinate. I was meeting with presbytery executives in Dubuque when states' news hit, and folks left as their governors announced stay orders.

Changes we have seen: Councils and churches prioritized and reassigned staff, rerouted finances, and repurposed facilities. They quickly innovated to remote worship options, electronic meetings, and social media messaging. Grassroot mixtures of collegial associations, stated clerks, mid council executives, office administrators, treasurers, educators, moderators, and technology staff huddled to leverage their scope of authority, interpret complex initiatives, and navigate municipal guidelines. Worship, funerals, weddings, baptisms and communion adapted to revised procedures. My synod organized emerging relief

strategies assisted by zoom. Pastors exchanged equipment and instructions for worship services in time for Easter. Conferences went remote. Online participation, became more accessible, exceeding past attendance. Volunteers made masks and supported deliveries of school supplies and groceries. Deacons and COMs phoned prayers through directories. Staff met electronically and payroll and banking rolled out from home offices. Chaplains and grief counselors kept pastoral teams updated. Efforts have been amazing, creative, imaginative, dedicated, tireless, thoughtful, resilient, and exhausting

We have learned:

- Traumatic stress, absorbed by caregivers, clergy and responders, is cumulative and leads to acute exhaustion, compassion fatigue and diminished recognition of boundaries.
- Mental health, emotional and spiritual care are needed as much as public health and safety cautions.
- Church leadership, mid council management and Board of Pensions need to provide practical, accessible, flexible support and COVID specific relief.



THE CHURCH NEEDS TO FLEX ITS SPIRITUAL FORTITUDE IN PUBLIC SPACE OUTSIDE OF THE PEW. THIS PANDEMIC FORCED US TO SEPARATE FROM OUR FAMILIAR PAST TO REALLY SEE A NEW ITERATION OF ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION, AND LOVE.

We recognize the need to:

- Deliver online counseling, health assessments, family support, financial management.
- Collaborate on local emergency management, volunteer resources, funeral services, and school support.
- Boost promotion of OGHS, PDA, SDOP, PHP and Matthew 25 opportunities.
- Offer space for lament and self-care in our liturgy.
- Reexamine our polity, theology and practices and assess community relations

and disaster plans to incorporate flexibility in any response to crisis.

To strengthen our witness, we must:

- Prepare response, recovery and repair plans now for the next disaster.
- Optimize virtual engagement as a necessary and irreplaceable supplement, not limited to emergency usage.
- Adapt structures, policies, and processes faster.
- Protect vulnerable persons in community – elders, sick, poor, incarcerated and oppressed.
- Address racial and economic disproportionality when disaster exposes conditions that cause injustice and inequities in health care and related cost increases.
- Capitalize on technology to access networks and join interfaith exchanges of information.
- Build resilient and smart financial recoveries.

The church needs to flex its spiritual fortitude in public space outside of the pew. This pandemic forced us to separate from our familiar past to really see a new iteration of energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.



GREGORY SAYS:

The church has demonstrated an incredible adaptability and resilience in the wake of this pandemic. One of the most salient ways this has been manifested is through the use of social media and other virtual tools. It has been a learning experience for most of us that we seem to be embracing with the realization that this has to be an essential and indispensable part of how we do ministry in the 21st century. However, although it is an invaluable supplement it is not a substitute for in person gatherings. We will continue to heed the counsel of

the Letter to the Hebrews to “forsake not the assembling of ourselves together” while augmenting and enhancing our ministry capacity with the virtual piece.

In many ways, COVID-19 is the crisis that reveals the crisis we were already in. It has, in a manner of speaking, democratized the suffering of the poor and people of color whose conditions, concerns and challenges have been ignored for generations. With so many more now being affected, it can no longer be ignored. Instead of pining and wishing for a return to the status quo ante, we have to commit ourselves to a fundamentally different way of being in the world that is life giving and life sustaining for all God’s children and all of creation. And the Matthew 25 Initiative of the PCUSA is one of the ways that we are addressing this as a denomination by promoting congregational vitality, the dismantlement of structural racism, and the eradication of systemic poverty.



In our interactions as Presbyterians with people of other religions and faith traditions, we seek respectful dialogical relationships and authentic witness. How do dialogue and witness help Presbyterians support those of other religious traditions who are targeted with hate speech and acts of violence?



ELONA SAYS:

The PCUSA is witnessing real demographic and social change here in this country and in the world, accompanied by media and public narratives that message fear, hate speech and

acts of violence.

During a Minnesota Education Equity Partnership conference, John A. Powell, director of Haas Institute for Fair and Inclusive Society, UC Berkeley, said “The opposite of racism is belonging.” It has deep implications for defining who the ‘we’ mirrors in a fear of the ‘other.’ This is especially dangerous if the church and other institutions retrench into its historic systems, firmly embedded with racism, without mutual efforts to create inclusive systems created for the emerging multiracial world.

If the PCUSA reaches out to engage in interfaith dialogue, it must transform disinformation into a message of racial equity. Dismantling systemic racism in the church requires courage to build inclusive policies, decolonize our practices, and invite those of other traditions to co-transform our structures so that together we can welcome belonging into the center of our relationships. I’ve addressed racism and reviewed policies in the church for over 40 years and will always stand in

support of those targeted because they are the ‘other.’

We will experience the KINGdom of heaven when we aim for equity, more than diversity. I believe that is possible if we can step into the ‘other’ reality of Matthew 25. It challenges us to open up space and wrestle with our history, our purpose, and the source of our social capital as a white dominant Christian institution. An institution that has hoarded systems of privilege on this continent since the Doctrine of Discovery.

Unless we confess that we have misused the gifts God gave us, we will continue to break our relationship with others. We will perpetuate these fears by blaming victims of hate crimes for the

injustice they suffer. When we focus on the poverty, citizenship status, language, or mistaken characteristics of another culture, we imply they aren’t good enough, and we fail to examine the root causes of these stereotypes that erase competency and substitute erroneous identities. Our purpose will be to seek out the source of the hate and work to dismantle it.

Dialogue is based on the art of listening and my hope is that the PCUSA will reimagine its

role in interfaith dialogue as a supportive one. If we are serious about interrupting hate speech, we will listen for the other unique spiritual perspectives or cultural experiences that shaped and contributed to that narrative. We’ve been socialized to see our leadership role as more significant than creating safe spaces, but that is exactly what we are called to do. We are called to build integrity in our relationships by creating trust. Everyone in the interfaith dialogue belongs at the table, shaping important questions and response as the lead voice. A strong faith-based interaction relies on greater participation and recognition of diverse voices. If we don’t protect the contribution

A STRONG FAITH-BASED INTERACTION RELIES ON GREATER PARTICIPATION AND RECOGNITION OF DIVERSE VOICES. IF WE DON’T PROTECT THE CONTRIBUTION OF THEIR KNOWLEDGE TO SACRED SPACE AND WORK, WE REMAIN COMPLICIT IN THE ASSIMILATION OF OTHER VOICES BY THE CULTURAL DEFINITIONS OF WHO IS IMPORTANT AND WHAT IS NORMAL.

of their knowledge to sacred space and work, we remain complicit in the assimilation of other voices by the cultural definitions of who is important and what is normal.



GREGORY SAYS:

When you enter a courtroom, there are multiple places to sit. There's the judge's seat, the prosecutor's table, the defense table, the jury box, and the witness stand. Following the laws of

physics, you cannot occupy more than one place at a time to save your life. The witness stand is our proper place as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has called us to be his witnesses to walk and to talk what we have seen and heard of God as revealed in his life, labor, and love. And what we see is a radical inclusivity and a willingness to cross all manner of barriers to connect with and have fellowship with people who do not share our racial, religious, socio-economic, or cultural background. We witness to the radically inclusive and expansive love of God when we step out of the narrow and constricting confines of parochialism and tribalism.



WE WITNESS TO THE RADICALLY INCLUSIVE AND EXPANSIVE LOVE OF GOD WHEN WE STEP OUT OF THE NARROW AND CONSTRICTING CONFINES OF PAROCHIALISM AND TRIBALISM.

Dr. Martin Luther King reminds us:

"Cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?' Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?' Vanity asks the question, 'Is it popular?' But conscience asks the question, 'Is it right?' And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because it is right."

We dialogue with and defend people of other faith groups-as well as those who don't claim any faith group- who are targeted with hate speech and violence because it is right.



What suggestions do you have for identifying new directions for the development of faithful leadership for the mission of Christ?



GREGORY SAYS:

Elona and I are excited about the Matthew 25 Initiative. The synod of Lakes and Prairies and Fellowship Presbyterian Church have both signed on. We believe this initiative helps to set us on a faithful

trajectory into the future that will engender fruitfulness for years to come.

A critical component of making this go is leadership development.

In Acts 6, we are told of a complaint that is brought by the Hellenistic widows about being neglected in the daily distribution of food. In a stroke of spiritual genius, the apostles effectively create a new office in the church by counseling the aggrieved widows to choose from among themselves “seven men who are in good standing, full of wisdom, and full of the Spirit.” Notice how leadership isn’t imposed from the outside but rather emerges out of the womb of the community. The apostles simply fine tune their vision by laying out the criteria to help them see what is already in their midst. Incidentally, the most recent issue of *Presbyterians Today* lifts up the vital role of deacons in caring for the people.

Going forward, we must fine tune our vision to see the people in our midst whom God has called to lead the faith community in redemptive and transformative ministry in the church and world. And then employ processes and practices that will edify, enhance and equip them to be even more effective in living out God’s call.

Dr. Tod Bolsinger reminds us that leadership is disappointing our people at a rate that they can

absorb. And in order to do this, we must start with conviction, stay connected, stay calm, and stay the course. Another way of saying this is to begin with the end in mind, maintain a non-anxious presence in the midst of chaos and conflict (be a thermostat rather than a thermometer), and to keep on keeping on.



ELONA SAYS:

This question is so very important as we adjust to the changes in how the 224th General Assembly will take place and why it will be a virtual assembly. Gregory and I did not hear this as a question about setting new directions, but about the key importance of developing faithful leadership.

The global losses ushered in just since the beginning of the year by COVID 19, increase the urgency of the PCUSA to address the conditions pronounced by Matthew 25. Faithful leadership

must be equipped and empowered to deepen their faith and be actively engaged with their community and the world, to break down the systems, practices and thinking that underlie discrimination, bias, prejudice and oppression of people of color and to work to change laws, policies, plans and

structures in society that perpetuate economic exploitation of people.

In the face of uncertainty, it is the courage and boldness of all caregivers and responders, the creativity of staff transitioning home space to work space, the dedication and imagination of pastors to lead worship and bring comfort to members, the persistence of teachers to inspire and encourage students, that identifies new directions for leadership development in the PCUSA.

With so many incredible models, I hope we will empower and equip leadership to build inclusive and accessible structures, policies and practices ensuring equity and belonging across

THE GLOBAL LOSSES USHERED IN JUST SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR BY COVID 19, INCREASE THE URGENCY OF THE PCUSA TO ADDRESS THE CONDITIONS PRONOUNCED BY MATTHEW 25.

communities separated by distance, economics, national interests, and ideologies. Deep in this hope is a call to be the living church made from the hands and feet of Christ's ministries

When the disciples asked Jesus what they should do, Jesus answered, "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness." Walter Brueggemann teaches that the word righteousness concerns public policy and the proper administration of social goods, social power and social access. So here, Christ directed the disciples' interests to the common good and well being of the community. Today, he might have told them, simply, to be the unity in the community.

Nurturing the energy, curiosity, commitment, and relations of our leadership will strengthen their ability to learn, adapt, adjust and serve in the midst of change. This is not a time to reduce our development resources, but to equip and empower all those who serve. The next generation has arrived and it is time to offer hope for now and action for the future.

We must support Christ's call to Matthew 25 around the world.

¹¹⁻¹² Because we know that this extraordinary day is just ahead, we pray for you all the time—pray that our God will make you fit for what he's called you to be, pray that he'll fill your good ideas and acts of faith with his own energy so that it all amounts to something. 2 Thessalonians 1



Panel on Christian Muslim Dialogue

