



May 2, 2011

"... And now these three remain: faith and hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." 1 Corinthians 13:13

Dear Trinity Members and Friends,

Life is filled with tensions. This is especially true of life in community with God's people. We are called to love one another, but we sometimes find ourselves in sharp disagreement with people's politics, such as their stand on abortion or immigration. We love one another, but we do not like their taste in worship music. We love one another, but we have an entirely different understanding of various points of theology. We have to learn to live with tension and disagreement.

There are times when these tensions peak. As we informed the congregation during our worship services this past Sunday, we are in that kind of 'peak tension' season in our national denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA). Our denomination has been struggling for decades with theological conflicts and church governance issues. At the present time, a national vote is underway that will most likely result in removing from our denomination's constitution (known as the *Book of Order*) certain ordination standards that Trinity supports.

On behalf of the board of elders and pastors (your session) whom you have chosen to provide the service of leadership for this congregation and beyond, we felt an urgent need to communicate with you at this time. We want to approach this challenge in a way that is productive, not destructive. First, you need information. We have enclosed a letter from the Rev. Dr. Jim Singleton, pastor of the 4,000 member First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, CO. Please read it for background on this vote and on a significant gathering in August in Minneapolis that several of our pastors and elders will attend.

As your session reflects on this significant change to the denomination's constitution, we want to begin by affirming that all are welcome in our congregation. We welcome all who are seeking to trust in and live by God's transforming grace in Jesus Christ. We also believe that those who are ordained to church leadership as pastors, elders and deacons are called to affirm what we understand to be the biblical standards of "fidelity and chastity." The new wording in the Book of Order removes the specific reference to "fidelity and chastity," and will likely allow persons to be considered for ordination who do not comply with these standards. This goes against our understanding of Scripture and of church tradition and practice that have stood for over 2000 years. Please rest assured that Trinity will continue to uphold the standards to which we are committed.

We firmly believe that God is at work in our midst. We know that the Lord calls us to humble ourselves before our Triune God and before one another (Philippians 2:1-4). And as 1 Corinthians 13:13 reminds us, God is always calling us to faith, to hope and to love. How do these apply to us now?

As we search our hearts in terms of *faith*, this conflict over ordination standards has made us aware that we have failed to call *all* God's people to faith and faithfulness in the area of sexuality. Sadly, we confess that in our effort to uphold what we believe to be the truth of Scripture, we have often communicated

condemnation and judgment on those with whom we disagree. Jesus was full of “grace and truth,” (John 1:17). We deeply regret that we have sometimes allowed our commitment to truth to eclipse grace and love. We are all broken. Recently a pastor commented to a group of us, “Regardless of what you believe about homosexuality, we must admit that the Church of Jesus Christ has been wounded far more by *heterosexual* sin than homosexual.” Lord, have mercy on us all. As a session we are beginning to explore how to call us all to repentance, confession and seeking wholeness in every area of life, including our sexuality.

In regards to *hope*, we believe God is working in new ways that will bear fruit in our lives as individuals and as a congregation. Perhaps, by God’s grace, we can even reach out to our culture with new expressions of humility, compassion and truth. But it must begin with us.

And in terms of *love*, we are aware that this could become a volatile time for congregations in the PC(USA), including our own, if we make this primarily an issue of church politics. We are committed to moving beyond church politics to elevate the conversation about all dimensions of sexuality, keeping grace and truth in holy balance. We do not want this to become an issue that divides us. We want, instead, to invite you to seek the Lord with us. We will be looking at a variety of ways to listen and respond to God’s Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit in this season.

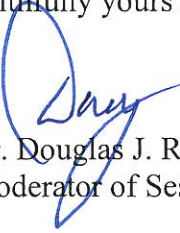
This will be a time of intellectual, emotional, relational and spiritual tension. But it is also a time for spiritual growth. We will move forward by studying God’s Word and listening carefully to each other. Good, godly people disagree. We all have our own stories that underlie our understanding of faith and life. We will practice the discipline of trusting our Lord and each other in the midst of the confusion and frustrations.

What can you do?

- Join us in prayer as we seek God’s wisdom and direction.
- Join us in patience and humility before the Lord who is head of the Church. We are all sinners saved by grace. There is no place for pride or condemnation.
- Continue to walk with us and support our thriving ministries at Trinity.

Thank you for your faith and faithfulness. In these challenging times, we know that God will guide us forward.

Faithfully yours for the Session of Trinity United Presbyterian Church,


Dr. Douglas J. Rumford,
Moderator of Session


Julie Turner,
Clerk of Session