



Greetings My Siblings in Christ –

In the midst of wrapping up my first “quarter” as your Moderator, and as a pastor who has just finished Holy Week, I write to you with a combination of breathless excitement and comprehensive exhaustion. Our collective Easter services have been resurrected in new ways once again this year, reminding me that even in death, God makes all things new and possible. What we couldn’t imagine in 2019, what came to be in 2020, and the hopes that lie on the horizon for 2021 have allowed us to create a way out of no way, so see Church afresh again. It is in this hope that I invite you to join us at our next virtual presbytery meeting scheduled for Tuesday, April 20th at 10am.

As someone committed and energized by new and out-of-the-box ministry, I am grateful for the many ways that I see same spirit reflected throughout the work of renewal in our congregations, ministries and presbytery. Church renewal is a vitally important objective and opportunity, given the number of Americans becoming religiously unaffiliated. At this meeting, we will listen to some of the initiatives taking shape through our Vital Congregations initiative, and the launching of our formational program funded by a Lilly Foundation grant - Cultivating Enough in the Care of Clergy. We will have the opportunity to hear some reflections from our most recent cohort of Princeton seminarians about their learnings and hopes regarding congregational leadership.

Strong congregational leaders cannot ignore the painful realities that surround us. The revitalization of the Church and the call to do justice are not mutually exclusive pathways. To address the injustices of our time is to do the new thing, it is an invitation to the work of the Spirit here and now, it is the path we must trod together if our hearts confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In May of 2020, the death of George Floyd brought to light for many of us the realization that although he was publicly and visibly crucified by the state, he was certainly not alone. Rayshard Brooks, Daniel Prude, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Aura Rosser, Stephon Clark, Botham Jean, Philando Castille, Alton Sterling, Michelle Cusseaux, Freddie Gray, Janisha Fonville, Eric Garner, Akai Gurley, Gabriella Navarez, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Tanisha Anderson: they spoke to our consciences. They called our names. They said: “Be silent no longer.” State-sanctioned death is not the only means of racially-motivated violence that we have witnessed. The anti-Asian massacre in Atlanta cost the lives of Soon Chung Park, Hyun Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Xiaojie Tan, and Daoyou Feng – also calling us to be silent no longer.

To listen to the cries of people of color, to center their stories and believe their truths – this is the call of the Christian. No longer can these tasks remain the labor of our churches of color or our social justice committees or of those church plants which seem free of the politics of our more-established churches. This charge must be the charge of the Body in total. Traditional, white churches can no longer shirk the task of becoming antiracist and simultaneously claim we are picking up our crosses and following Jesus. We must be revitalized and if necessary torn up and replanted in the all-encompassing love of God. For this reason, you may have noticed the many ways in which our Presbytery is currently addressing the sin of racism, which I will address in more detail in my report.

With great hope for our future, I confidently and joyfully commend to you our spiritual leader for this meeting, the Rev. Dr. Victor Aloyo, Jr., whose work has already commenced in our Presbytery. His grace-filled and invitational approach to antiracism formation is a welcome shift from the doctrinal and pedagogical approaches many of us have experienced in the past. Dr. Aloyo has been a spiritual and humble partner on the road toward deeper relationship and understanding; I look forward to his address, “The Hope and Work of Resurrection.” Like a good shepherd, Dr. Aloyo continues to lead us toward right paths for God's name's sake.

Continuing in the vein of revitalization and recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit, we will also have the opportunity to examine Christen Blore for ordination. She currently serves as the Chaplain and Co-Director of the Alumni Care Initiative at Palmer Theological Seminary, a validated ministry of the Presbytery of Philadelphia. If the way be clear, her's will be my second ordination. I'm looking forward to my first: Cara Cavicchia, Pastor of Family Ministry and Spiritual Formation at Lower Providence Presbyterian Church.

There is light on the horizon as we consider our next meeting as well, hopefully in-person at Camp Kirkwood. It will be a bittersweet time as we say farewell to what has been a spiritual home for many of us. New possibilities for resurrection exist there, too, as we consider what that site may become for future generations.

These are challenging times for many reasons, but I see a way forward through the pain our society and church are simultaneously experiencing. The God of our weary years does not allow us to grow faint, but rather urges us on toward the creation of a more just and righteous kingdom. As we look toward the light at the end of the tunnel, let us begin to reflect the hope of Christ for all people – in the name of our Lord, and honoring the names of George, Breonna, and Soon.

Blessings and peace –

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashley B. Rossi'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Rev. Ashley B. Rossi, Moderator of the Presbytery of Philadelphia