April 10, 2019

To my esteemed Tools and Training colleagues,

I had the honor of participating in this year’s Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) in Washington DC and the good fortune of receiving a $300 scholarship from the Tools and Training Committee at Presbytery. EAD is sponsored by the National Council of Churches and as such, there were many denominations represented including a fair number of Presbyterians.

PGV was well represented by 7 of us, which we found out is not the norm. Many presbyteries have 1 or 2 people. The 7 included Susan Orr, Karen Walker, Elaine Johnson, Lynette Sparks, Tom Upson, Laura Bachmann and me. We traveled together via van to Washington.

In these difficult political and human times it is easy to become discouraged. It was good to be around 100’s of hope filled, faithful people. Many of the speakers and attendees were persons of color, Latino and/or LGBTQ. The swirl of the spirit was palpable.

The first day, Friday, was a meeting of Presbyterians for Compassion, Peace and Justice Day. This meeting was held at the historic New York Avenue Presbyterian Church which was the church that Abraham Lincoln attended. All of the pews in the sanctuary have been updated save for his. It is a beautiful, dark wood with his name plate attached. The main speaker was David LaMott who told us that “large scale change happens when many people make small intentional efforts in the same direction.”

Saturday and Sunday, days 2 and 3 where filled to the brim with powerful sermons, enlightening issue workshops which included global and domestic economic justice; social, racial and climate justice; updates on troubled areas of our world including Palestine and Yeman. These work shops were mind expanding. There was also training for our trip to “The Hill”.

There were 2 “asks”. One centered on passing a bill in the Senate on voting rights. It has passed in congress. Currently it appears to be held back by Sen. McConnell. A letter written and signed by many of us was delivered to his office on Monday. The second is the Global Fragility Act. The hope is, if this is passed, long term studies can be done in troubled areas of our world to determine root, systemic causes of turmoil and to develop ways to stem devastating cycles of violence.

On Monday a large, interdenominational group met with Sen. Gillibrand’s staff to discuss the asks and hope for support from the Senator. Our group of 7 were the only ones who met with Rep. Morelli’s staff. There were hundreds of meetings all day long with Senators and Representatives including a vigil in Sen. McConnell’s office. Faith in action!!!

I am still processing my thoughts on it all but sum it up with the words on a bracelet that I was given. The bracelet says “Out of chaos, Hope.” Powerful words.

Peace and Blessings,

Elder Mindy Shaffer