

I begin by paraphrasing the Apostle Paul with greetings to the holy ones who are a part of the Presbyterian Church of Laramie; grace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

What a grand and historic day in the life of your congregation as we celebrate the installation of The Rev. Michelle Bacon as your Pastor. Remembering Paul's words, "That you may know the hope with which God has called."

Today you enter into a sacred covenant with Michelle and God about your shared life together. I was deeply honored when Michelle asked me to deliver the Charge to the Congregation on this grand occasion.

First of all, I charge you to grant Michelle the freedom to dream and the permission to lead. You have a rich history of dreaming here. Recently, Steve Shive observed that of the 28 churches in the Wyoming Presbytery, half will not be around a decade from now QUOTE without some significant dying to "the way we've been doing it" and rising to some new form of being church."

It's about vision, the thing without which the people perish. Be open to Michelle's new ideas. Allow her, indeed, expect her to lead. Don't expect everything to stay the same. You are on a journey of faith, to continue discovering who God is calling you to be and what God is calling you to do.

The freedom of the pulpit is honored by Presbyterians as critical to following the boldness of Jesus. I charge you to vigorously uphold and defend this right—even in the face of disagreement or controversy.

One of the admonitions I received from a seminary professor was this. "Be careful of what you say during a sermon, because someone in the pews just might believe it."

So, know how carefully Michelle has chosen her words, endeavoring to be a messenger of Christ. Reward the hours she spent working on that twenty-minute sermon, the love of God and this congregation she poured out on those pieces of paper with the prayer that what she has to say will impact someone's life.

Create an atmosphere that minimizes the stress of unrealistic expectations. Encourage, don't criticize. When you disagree with something she says or does, **and if she's doing her job right**, you will from time to time disagree with something she says or does, speak directly to her about it and speak honestly, with grace and with love.

Finally, support Michelle with prayer, love, patience, understanding and kindness. Nurture her personal well-being and reach out to Michelle through tangible acts of encouragement.

In closing, I'll quote Parker Palmer from his book, *Let Your Life Speak*. "As we move into the future that God is opening before us, we have an invitation to imagine impossible possibilities. Guided by God and led by the Spirit, the future awaits us and it is a future full of hope."

As Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, I say to you, "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, I charge you, as members of the United Presbyterian Church of Laramie, to promise and covenant with God and with Michelle, to journey together, lovingly and faithfully, into a future full of hope. AMEN