

Rise up, come to our help.

Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. *Psalm 44:26*

Circle of Love

The circle of love is broken whenever there is alienation,
whenever there is misunderstanding,
whenever there is insensitivity and hardening of the heart.

This was part of the prayer of confession lifted up at our Presbytery meeting on Saturday. It has been shared as part of the "[Native American Sunday](#)" worship resources for the PC(USA). November is Native American Indian Heritage Month, and our observance of this has grown from year to year. There was a time when this was the one Presbytery meeting each year when we would acknowledge our Indigenous hosts. Now, we open every meeting with a land acknowledgement, and in this meeting we considered a recommendation to return the site of La Casa de San Gabriel to the Gabrieleno-Tongva Tribal Council. This was perhaps the most discussed item on our docket on Saturday, as some folks shared fond memories from years past at La Casa, some talked about the historic and cultural significance of that property and the potential that the tribe can do with it, and some were able to honor and give thanks for the past ministry of La Casa while also opening up to a new future with the Tongva tribe.

This was just one of several moments in the meeting that were emotional touchstones for folks. We started with a welcome and song and prayer from Live Oak Community Church, one of our new worshipping communities that brings hope and inspiration to all of us. We are so thankful to Pastor Andrew Ritiau, worship leader Shawn Halim and the worship team, Paul and Kathie Ashworth, Shawna Banks, and so many at the church who hosted us so beautifully.

We welcomed back Sandy Tice, now a recent retiree, and prayed for Claremont Presbyterian Church as they enter into a time of transition with Sandy as Bridge Pastor through the end of January. Sandy shared how she came to know Christ while a youth at Eagle Rock Presbyterian Church, recognizing Carolyn Harris as one who helped shape her faith so many years ago. This was timely, as it was also announced that the original Eagle Rock congregation will hold their last Sunday morning worship service on December 29.

And we voted to approve installing Chris Jinyoung Choi as Associate Pastor/Korean Language Minister Head Pastor of Pasadena Presbyterian Church. Several PPC members from all three language ministries came to show their support for Chris' ministry, which was a wonderful thing to see. His installation will be Sunday, January 12, 2025, at 3 pm at PPC, and I hope that we can be with PPC as they celebrate this step forward.

We heard from Rev. Dr. Charity Ngaruiya, the Protestant Chaplain at LA General Medical Center, shared stories of pain and resilience from her work with patients. And we heard from Royi Lopez about the amazing ministry at Baldwin Park United Methodist Church, who provide short-term hospitality for asylum seekers on their way to their sponsors, some of whom live in other states. The church doesn't just provide a safe place to sleep for a day or three; they welcome them with a meal, listen to their stories, and preserve their dignity in the way they welcome the families and the quality of items they offer to them. We contributed to their efforts with blankets, towels, toys, and money that the church can use for other needed items.

In light of the many areas of tragedy these days, the Education Equipping and Empowerment Committee offered a Service of Lament for the Presbytery meeting, when we remembered loved ones we have lost this past year, confessed the ways we live on land taken from our Indigenous neighbors, and heard about the ongoing war in Ukraine and Gaza and Lebanon, and about the impact of Hurricane Helene on Montreat Presbyterian Conference Center and so many communities in North Carolina and elsewhere. Many thanks to Rev. Dr. Charles Marks, who expressed the tragic statistics of suffering in Gaza and shared his personal grief as he has family in Lebanon. And though Dean Thompson, who loves Montreat, could not be with us, Carrie Kohler shared, because she has experienced Montreat since her youth, and her brother lives nearby. We prayed with each other and as a body, knowing that there are different burdens carried by each individual, including the private grief carried by people who dread the holiday season as they mourn loved ones or for whom the holidays can unlock waves of pain. The worship was led by members of the EEE Committee and Sandy Tice and Margarita Reyes, and the music that Shawn Halim and company provided was so meaningful and moving and appropriate for the lament and the worship.

There were the usual November items on Saturday, such as approval of the budget and election of leaders for next year and my reflection on the past year's ministry. And our friends from Planta Colectivo and Refugee Children's Center came so we could do some holiday shopping. Throughout, I felt that last Saturday's meeting was marked not by a circle of love that is broken, but the circle of love that is growing wider and stronger as we take time to share and pray with each other, and take action to live into our faith in this difficult time. And for that and much more, I am most grateful.

Blessings,

Wendy