

A Pastoral Letter

“Just as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.”
Matthew 25:40

As teaching elders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we are bound to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the witness of Scripture, and the Confessions of the Church as the foundations of our ministry. These root sources instill in us the importance of compassion, fairness and justice in the church, our personal lives, and the public realm. An enduring principle of our discipleship is the call to sacrifice for the sake of others, after the manner of Christ, and a commitment to the common good beyond our own personal interest.

Within our Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, concern for the common good has focused on providing quality public education, ensuring affordable health care, and promoting the general welfare of the people – with particular attention to those whom Jesus called “the least of these.” As church leaders in North Carolina we are particularly concerned that recent legislative actions may undercut these commitments and lead to greater disadvantages for the most vulnerable among us who already contend with poverty and diminished opportunity.

Informed people of faith can disagree about particular legislative decrees. We know that we live in a time of division, when political and social issues threaten to split apart our communities, our nation, our state, and even our religious bodies. Grounded in our unity in Christ, we believe we have an opportunity to model a more excellent way forward amidst our social and political diversity, engaging with one another in mutual forbearance. Acknowledging that the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian gospels compel us to work for justice for those who live under the crippling weight of poverty, we invite you to explore how God’s compelling vision of a just and fair society might become more manifest today. As Presbyterians, how might we follow Jesus’ call to his disciples to extend care and compassion to the least and the lost? How might we, today, affirm the Confession of 1967 when it says, “The members of the church are emissaries of peace and seek the good of all in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics”? (9:25)

As we enter this New Year, we invite Presbyterians across North Carolina to join us as we pray for the poor, the overlooked, and the marginalized in our state. We invite our congregations to join us this Lent in study, prayer, and discussion around these matters. In a spirit of humility and boldness befitting Christ’s followers, let us renew our calling as advocates for the greater public good.