



## Our journey through Lent

To the pastors and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As followers of Christ, our journey through Lent has begun. Originally a time of instruction and preparation for baptism of those who were new to the Christian faith, we know it as a season for reflection and rededication of one's faith in preparation for Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection on Easter morning.

In commenting on the Lenten journey, Gradye Parsons writes, "The journey through Lent often involves a series of paths that require us to pass through a gate so that we can continue moving forward in faith" (*Open to Me the Gates*, Witherspoon Press, 2012). He continues by pointing out how the gate in an ancient city was a great "equalizer"—regardless of one's position in life, it was necessary to pass through the gate to tend to daily tasks or business. It was also a place where people gathered for various reasons.

The other journey we are on at present is the one leading to the 220th General Assembly in Pittsburgh this summer (June 29–July 7). In a way, the process that church councils are using to overture the assembly is a great equalizer—every ruling elder who comes to the session table, and every ruling and teaching elder who gathers as a commissioner for a presbytery meeting, are equal to one another in their discernment and decision-making as a council. The same will be true of the ruling and teaching elders that are elected by presbyteries to be commissioners at the General Assembly itself. As the apostle Paul wrote, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:21, 27).

It is easy to find divisions near home and far away on the other side of the globe. Unfortunately, when we focus on divisions, we miss those things we share in common with all of God's children.

The good news is that the church is God's gift to us as a place where we can gather and be together, sharing our humanity, our joys and concerns, and our frailties and strengths. It is where we are offered and receive forgiveness. It is where we all are surprised by grace. Thanks be to God!

May our common witness to our unity in Christ deepen throughout our Lenten journey and our journey toward Pittsburgh.

Faithfully yours,

**Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly**

**Linda Valentine, Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council**