

Introducing

The Rev. Dr. Sheldon W. Sorge



Candidate for the office of
Pastor to Pittsburgh Presbytery

December 3, 2009

A Note from Your Nominating Committee:

When we began to solicit applications for the position of Pastor to Presbytery, we were struck by two notions. First, we believed that the one whom God called to this position would be a person who has “the heart of a shepherd and the skills of a rancher.” By this we meant that at our core we believe that presbytery is a gathering of God’s people who are called, equipped, and sent on a mission – a group of people who need to be tended and guided in ways that will bring out the best in us and call us to new ways of living into ancient truths. Yet we realize that however much we want to be known and cared for as individuals, the presbytery is also a web of complex structures and leadership of this organization requires a set of skills that few people possess.

Secondly, when asked to name a theological issue with which the presbytery needs to deal, we mentioned *acedia*, or “sloth”. Not because we think we are a lazy or apathetic group, but because we sensed within the presbytery a sense of being burnt out or even jaded in our relationships with each other. When the ancient church named the “Seven Deadly Sins”, it used the word *acedia* to describe an “absence of caring” which led to inactivity that could be construed as laziness. We were looking for a leader who could inspire us to care and get involved.

By God’s grace, we met several dynamic people who possessed these qualifications. That is good news for the entire church, and great news for Pittsburgh Presbytery. We invite you to read through this introduction and join us in welcoming the Rev. Dr. Sheldon W. Sorge as our new Pastor to Presbytery, and to commit yourself, as we have, to joining him in seeking to be fruitful in ministry in this place at this time.

Rev. De Neice Welch, Rev. Carol Divens Roth, Elder Cathy Nelson,
Rev. Ted Martin, Rev. Jean Henderson, Elder Frank Hancock,
Elder Gary Gallo, Elder Mary Evans, Rev. David Carver

Voices from Around the Church...

Sheldon Sorge has a passion for Jesus Christ, for people and for the world. His heart is large and his compassion is deep. With his gift of music, both voice and piano, and with his gift of theological scholarship, Pittsburgh Presbytery would be blessed indeed to have such a fine Pastor to Presbytery.

Betty Meadows (General Presbyter, Mid-Kentucky Presbytery)

Dr. Sheldon Sorge impressively embodies the major callings and responsibilities of ministry in our Reformed tradition: the minister as preacher, teacher, pastor, and leader. At our best, Presbyterians are thinking people with warm hearts. Sheldon is a splendid representative of this important vocational identity. To borrow the words of the apostle Paul, the Rev. Sorge is a winsome servant of Jesus Christ and a faithful steward of the mysteries of God.

Dean K. Thompson (President, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary)

I am delighted to think of Sheldon Sorge as the next Pastor to Pittsburgh Presbytery. I grew to know Sheldon and Tammy when we were teaching Doctor of Ministry students at Dubuque Seminary and then when working with Sheldon and twenty others for the four years of the Missional Presbyteries Project. Sheldon brings a remarkable breadth of experience to this call including service in the pastorate, service on the denominational staff, adjunct teaching in our seminaries and enriching work with the Louisville Institute. As a result he has a wonderfully in-depth grasp of the issues facing the whole church. Add to that his vision for a vital church, passion for worship and his gifts of leadership capacity and the future for the presbytery looks very promising!

E. Stanley Ott (Founder and President, Vital Churches Institute)

Sheldon brings together a passion for Jesus, an understanding of the Church, knowledge and respect for our Reformed heritage, and zeal to follow the Holy Spirit into God's future. The health and integrity of Pittsburgh Presbytery is not only vital to the congregations in that region, but as a microcosm of the denomination, you are vital to the mission and direction of the PC(USA). Should this call be confirmed, you will have chosen your next "pastor" well.

Paul Detterman (Executive Director, Presbyterians for Renewal)

Sheldon Sorge has a remarkable combination of gifts, which should enable him to serve as Pastor to the Presbytery. He is an extraordinarily gifted worship leader with a fine appreciation for a variety of worship styles, yet with an abiding respect for our Reformed tradition. He is also well informed about our Reformed tradition, especially in its theology and history. He respects other points of view and he honors the presence of Christ when people have gathered to do the Lord's work. He will listen in a pastoral way to individuals and groups and when it responds it will often be with respect for Christ, scripture, and our confessions.

Laird Stuart (Pastor, Calvary Presbyterian Church;
Former Moderator, Covenant Network of Presbyterians)

Sheldon's Story...in his own words

By God's grace I was reared to know and love Jesus as my Lord and Savior from as far back as I can remember. A child of the manse, from my earliest years I was "marked" for pastoral ministry, though I struggled with owning that call until age 18, at which time I "surrendered all" to follow the call. Having been raised in a Pentecostal tradition, I pursued the standard preparation for ministry in those circles via a Bible college education. Soon afterward I followed that with a degree in religion and philosophy, then graduate study in theology culminating in the Ph.D. Along the way, I became convinced that God was calling me into the Presbyterian Church, where I have labored gladly in ministry since 1987.

Each stage of my ministry has offered me and those I serve many opportunities for growth. In my first call in North Carolina, I developed a friendship with a local African American Baptist pastor that led us to bring together our congregations for worship and mission – twenty years later, those two congregations continue collaborating regularly in worship and witness. In my next call in Virginia, I was asked to lead the congregation in updating our physical facilities; joyously, we were able to double our total space without taking a mortgage, adding new facilities that are used often by the community and the presbytery. In my third congregation in West Virginia, we birthed a major daily after-school program for at-risk children that continues strong ten years later.

In 2000 I was called to the national offices of the PCUSA, to lead the Office of Theology and Worship's Pastor-Theologian program and to inaugurate a new ministry of mentored covenant groups for first-call pastors. From a modest first cohort of 30 new pastors, that ministry has grown to reach more than 500 of our church's pastors, and continues to provide vocational encouragement, admonition, and direction for many today – including my own daughter and her husband. Most recently, I have been privileged to lead the Louisville Institute's grant-making programs for pastors, strengthening its program of grants for pastoral sabbaticals while implementing a flourishing new grant program for pastoral study projects.

At each step forward in my ministry, I have been blessed to look back and see the steady hand of God's providence leading me in ways that I had never planned, yet that turned out to form a straight path. And now I



Clockwise from bottom right, Sheldon, Grant Parlier, Tammy, Justin Parlier, Andrew Parlier, Sonya Sorge Parlier, Stephanie Sorge Wing, and Andy Wing

stand on another threshold looking back, amazed to see the hand of God gently and clearly leading me through places and experiences that have prepared me unawares for the work to which I am being called in Pittsburgh.

My companions along the way have made all the difference for me. My wife Tammy Wiens, also an ordained PCUSA minister and currently the Associate for Spiritual Formation for the PCUSA, is my best friend and soul-mate, with whom I have been privileged to lead many conferences and retreats over the years. We especially enjoy making music – she’s a terrific singer, while I am a jazz-gospel pianist. My older daughter Sonya lives in Stuart’s Draft, Va. with her husband and our two grandsons – it’s not Lake Wobegon, but those children sure are above average! My younger daughter Stephanie and her husband are co-pastors of the First Presbyterian Church of Harrodsburg, Ky. When we’re not making music, Tammy and I enjoy long walks with our dog Cameron, or even better, addressing golf balls with the various utensils needed to launch them strong and true. Natives of Alberta in western Canada, we grew up romping the Canadian Rockies – Pittsburgh will no doubt help us get our goat legs back!

With Advent Joy,

Sheldon

Sheldon’s Statement of Faith

Through the amazing grace of Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, and the intimate embrace of the Holy Spirit, I belong to God - my comfort and joy, in life and in death.

I trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, God’s hope for the world, and for me too. I seek to follow Jesus’ example, to obey his word, and to embrace his sacrifice on my behalf. I believe that it is to Jesus that the Scriptures testify – they are God’s Word written, even as Jesus is God’s Word personified. It was for me that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, affirming the length to which God will go to reach me; it was for me that Jesus lived and died to demonstrate that nothing can separate me from God’s love; it was for me that Jesus rose again to confirm the hope that I too shall live forever in God’s presence.

As one claimed by Jesus, I have come to know the Almighty Creator in the way Jesus knew God: as my precious Father, who in the womb of the Holy Spirit birthed me into new life as a member of the royal family of God. As with Jesus in the Jordan, so with me – in my baptism, God claimed me as “my beloved,” and the Holy Spirit called me as a servant of the Gospel, to proclaim God’s coming reign, to call people to repentance from sin, and to declare God’s boundless favor revealed in Jesus Christ.

Calling me into fellowship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit unites me to Christ so that it is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me. I nurture this union by receiving gladly the gifts of Christ’s body and blood through the bread and wine of holy communion. United to Christ, I am thereby inseparably joined to every member of his body. None of us can say to the other, “I do not need you.” For the sake of Christ and the Gospel, I cannot disown any who hold to the essentials of the faith – which, according to Calvin, are that God is one, Christ is God, and God is merciful.

Just as with his first followers, Jesus has called me first as a companion, second as a disciple, and third as an ambassador in the world. As companions, we take joy in each other’s company, he hears my heart and I hear his. As a disciple I give myself to obeying his word and emulating his life. And as an ambassador I am called to declare the Gospel to a world starved for the good news that God loves us more than we can possibly imagine.

All who call upon the name of the Lord are rescued from destructive pathways, and brought to peace with God and neighbor. There is no longer a need to destroy, dominate, or discredit others; such judgment belongs only to God. I am saved from the clutches of self-righteousness, made into a new person who is genuinely teachable and peaceable with all.

The church is the place where God’s intention for all humanity is displayed, albeit imperfectly. In this community the need to be right is overcome by the need to love. The pursuit of truth and justice is one. We discover that God’s love topples every self-protective barrier we erect. Our way of life together demonstrates that the Gospel really is true, it does indeed overcome everything that formerly separated us from God and from each other.

I believe I have been called by God as a servant of this good news, to proclaim it in word, to demonstrate it in deed, and to guard it in love. In the power of the Holy Spirit, I strive to fulfill this high calling from God in Christ Jesus. To God alone be the glory. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Sheldon W. Sorge

Educational Background

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Service to the Church

January 2007 – present: Associate Director, The Louisville Institute, Louisville Seminary, Louisville KY.

2005 – present: Served on initial design team and continue to serve in leadership of the Presbyterian CREDO program.

2005 – present: Adjunct Professor of Worship, Louisville Seminary.

September 2000 – December 2006: Associate for Theology, General Assembly Council, Louisville KY.

2000 – 2005: Developed and led Pastor-Theologian consultations for the PCUSA in Boise, Boston, Charlotte, Dallas, Geneva (Switzerland), and Louisville.

1999 – present Adjunct Professor of Ministry and Worship, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.

January 1999 – August 2000: Pastor/Head of Staff, Davis Memorial Presbyterian Church, Elkins WV. 350 members.

August 1993 – December 1998: Pastor/Head of Staff, Royal Oak Presbyterian Church, Marion VA. 220 members.

1995 – 1998 Adjunct Professor of Theology, King College

1993: Ordained as Minister of the Word & Sacrament by Abingdon Presbytery

June 1987 – July 1993: Minister of Worship and Discipleship, Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church, Durham NC. 550 members.

1987 Ph.D., Theology and Ethics, Duke University 1983 M.A., Theology and Ethics, Duke University

1981 B.A., Religion and Philosophy, Roberts Wesleyan College

1975 Diploma, Pastoral Ministry, Elim Bible Institute

