

P R E S S R E L E A S E

May 21, 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A RESPONSE TO REV. BILL GOOD AND THE CHURCHES OF FOUNTAIN HILLS ATTACKING PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANS

Recently eight churches in Fountain Hills, Arizona, posted banners announcing a collective sermon series entitled “Progressive’ Christianity: Fact or Fiction.” The Rev. Bill Good of Fountain Hills Presbyterian Church, and president of the local clergy association, mischaracterized in his first sermon a distinction between “Progressive Christianity” and what he called “Biblical Christianity,” insinuating that Progressive Christianity is not Biblical nor a valid expression of Christian faith. We respectfully reject this false dichotomy and claim what is often labeled as Progressive Christianity to be a faithful expression of Christian faith in the spirit of Jesus Christ who crossed cultural boundaries and challenged traditional norms for the sake of God’s love, especially for the poor, oppressed, and socially marginalized. The entire spirit of this campaign is not in keeping with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

As clergy members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the same denomination as Rev. Good, we, the undersigned of this statement, celebrate the vast diversity of expressions of Christian faith present in the Body of Christ—the Church universal—and further state that Rev. Good’s views do not represent our views, the views of the Christian congregations we serve, nor the views of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a Christian denomination and has been, and continues to be, a classically liberal denomination of Christian faith that attempts to honor diversity of opinion and faith, even protecting the voices of minority positions, while still keeping to the essentials of Christian faith. We are hesitant to define these essentials, understanding that we will make mistakes and are still growing in our understanding of God’s will. We tend to be cautious around any dogmatic statements or claims of absolute truth because God is infinite and cannot be contained by the limits of human understanding and language. Each statement that is made, however, combined with the many statements and understandings offered throughout our historical tradition, offer glimpses of truth that help us discern God’s will for our lives today and for the positive and faithful transformation of the world according to God’s creative love and grace, as revealed through Jesus Christ.

The Hebrew Scriptures teach us to “not bear false witness against our neighbor” (Exodus 20.16). We believe Rev. Good and his colleagues are preaching a distorted view of progressive Christianity to serve their own purposes rather than God’s. In our Gospels, Jesus teaches us to “do to others as you

would have them do to you” (Matthew 7.12). A major thread that runs throughout the Bible, and summarized by Jesus, is that we are called to love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. An important aspect of this love is the respect of self and others, especially those with whom we might disagree (Matthew 5.44). We believe Rev. Good’s intentions violate God’s standards of love and seek to tear down rather than build up the Body of Christ.

We celebrate and appreciate a healthy tension between conservative, progressive, and other understandings of God, Jesus, and the Bible, even though we may disagree on many things. We believe we are all better together than apart, and seek to build bridges of understanding and mutual respect. Each perspective presents opportunities and challenges that hold us all accountable to the Spirit of God and the central Biblical call to healthy, mutual and faithful relationships. But we cannot support, condone, nor keep silent about anyone who claims Christian identity and then openly attacks the peace, unity, and purity of the Body of Christ by calling some within it “not really Christian.”

We consider Rev. Good a colleague and a brother in Christ, along with the other clergy participating in this action. We are deeply saddened by the tone and language being used in this campaign, and are especially concerned as the campaign seems to be directed at one particular neighboring congregation: The Fountains United Methodist Church and its pastor, the Rev. David Felton. We believe Rev. Good’s actions are not in keeping with Jesus’ teachings, nor the teachings of our Scriptures. We implore Rev. Good and his colleagues to stop this divisive behavior. We stand in solidarity with Rev. Felton and our sisters and brothers at The Fountains, and hold them all in prayer. We also hold in prayer Rev. Good, our sisters and brothers in the congregation he serves, and the other clergy and congregations participating, trusting that somehow God’s love will win in the end for all of our sakes.

We implore Rev. Good and his colleagues to stop these attacks, take down their banners, and, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, seek to be in conversation and dialogue to seek deeper understanding and respect, rather than resorting to overly simplistic attacks that further drive a wedge into the heart of the Body of Christ—seeking understanding over division; seeking to love rather than hate; seeking to build up rather than tear down.

Sincerely, your sisters and brothers in Christ,

The Rev. Eric O. Ledermann, University Presbyterian Church, Tempe, Arizona
The Rev. Peggy Roberts, Presbytery of Grand Canyon at-large, Phoenix, Arizona
The Rev. Linda Worsnop, Palo Christi Presbyterian Church, Paradise Valley, Arizona
The Rev. Leslie Vogel, Presbytery of Grand Canyon, Mission Co-worker, Phoenix, Arizona/Guatemala
The Rev. José Olagues, Presbytery of Grand Canyon, Honorably Retired,

Phoenix, Arizona

The Rev. Cynthia A. Jennison, Memorial Presbyterian Church, Phoenix, Arizona

The Rev. Sue Wintz, Presbytery of Grand Canyon, Board Certified Chaplain,
Mesa, Arizona

The Rev. Dr. Arthur J. Campbell, Presbytery of Grand Canyon, Honorably
Retired, Chandler, Arizona

The Rev. Larry Corbett, Presbytery of Grand Canyon, at-large Interim, Estes
Park, Colorado

The Rev. Deanne Hodgson, Presbytery of Grand Canyon, Honorably Retired,
Phoenix, Arizona

The Rev. Ken Moe, Presbytery of Grand Canyon, Honorably Retired, Mesa,
Arizona

The Rev. Shelly Moe, Celebration of Life Presbyterian Church, Mesa, Arizona

The Rev. Martha Sadongei, Central Presbyterian Church, Phoenix, Arizona

The Rev. Doug Baer, Presbytery of Grand Canyon, Honorably Retired, Phoenix,
Arizona

The Rev. Tully M. Fletcher IV, Orangewood Presbyterian Church, Phoenix,
Arizona

The Rev. Terry Palmer, Gilbert Presbyterian Church, Gilbert, Arizona

The Rev. Richard Nielsen, Presbytery of Grand Canyon, Honorably Retired,
Scottsdale, Arizona

The Rev. David Hicks, First Presbyterian Church, Yuma, AZ