

As we head into the final few months of 2020 let us take a deep breath. Whew.

When this year started, I had a whole other plan in my mind for the ministry of the Presbytery and where we would be headed. I was expecting other things too: a family trip this past summer to Colombia, time in North Carolina with my parents, a get-away for our 20th wedding anniversary in June, and other family and friends celebrations and gatherings. I was expecting to go to the General Assembly in Baltimore, a city I have loved to visit since my childhood, having brought a membership this year to the National Aquarium, anticipating many visits to that city this year.

We collectively rang the New Year in as the start of the 2020's. Many of the big-picture conversations for what this decade would bring was that this decade is **the** pivotal one for humanity to get a grip on the climate crisis, to change our ways, and to be in solidarity across the globe in healing and renewing the Creation. Alas, what happened is that our carelessness and disregard that borders on abuse for God's precious creatures and their habitats landed everyone in a massive global health pandemic.

What plans and possibilities for this year were in your mind at the beginning of this year? What things did you have planned with your loved ones, family and friends? What professional and personal goals have had to be set aside? What was enlivening your imagination back in January? I imagine, the reality in our household and the prayers and laments in my heart, are not so different from your own.

It has also been a year where over and over again I have been in awe of the resiliency and faithfulness of the many ministers and leaders that make up this Presbytery. So many ministries have made significant transitions during this pandemic, we have walked through an election season that was fraught and painful on so many levels and we as the larger Presbytery have continued to strengthen and spiritually prepare in our anti-racism work. As this year begins to draw to a close I am grateful and honored to walk alongside each of you.

Please note two important communications in the Presbytery packet and that went out via email to all Moderators and Clerks of Sessions on November 13th. The first regards the rising Covid-19 infection rates throughout the Presbytery and our strong urging for all ministries to return to virtual-only gatherings for the safety and care of our communities. The second is from the Committee on Ministry encouraging all congregations to make use of two worship services that are being prepared for December 27, 2020 and January 3, 2021 (including communion) and to give both Sundays as time off to all worship leaders and pastors without impact on continuing education or vacation time. Exhaustion is a real thing and many of our leaders around the Presbytery are quite simply - exhausted, spirit and body. **Please,**

please, receive this gift from the Presbytery and allow them time off for rest and re-creation. This has been and continues to be a season of leadership like no other.

I wish each of you blessings and peace as we enter into the Season of Advent in a few weeks. Advent, of course, is a season of waiting, something that has taken on many new meanings this year. In our waiting, might we also prepare - for the inbreaking of the Christ Child again into our midst - and for God's reign of peace-filled justice for all of Creation!

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannan". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter 'S' being particularly large and stylized.

Rev. Shannan Vance-Ocampo
General Presbyter