



The Presbytery Of  
**Giddings-Lovejoy**  
Presbyterian Church (USA)



**AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA**

Dear Siblings in Christ:

Greetings from St. Louis! We are blessed and proud to be the host city for the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly. From June 16<sup>th</sup> – June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018, Presbyterians from across the country will gather under our Arch to worship, learn, discern, and take action. As members of the Committee on Local Arrangements, and active leaders in the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy, we are eager to greet you and welcome you to our beautiful and complicated city.

The theme of next year's Assembly is: **Renewing the Vision: Kindom Building for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**. There is no better place in the United States to explore this vision right now than in St. Louis, Missouri! We believe that God has opened up a unique opportunity for the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly to be bold and faithful in speaking words of justice and hope in a broken and hurting world.

We are sure that many of you are aware of the social unrest and political challenges St. Louis is facing. The national chapter of NAACP, has issued a travel advisory for the State of Missouri – pointing to troubling instances of racism and discrimination against people of color throughout our state. Furthermore, the recent legal decision not to convict Officer Jason Stockley in the point-blank shooting of Anthony Lamar Smith, has once again put St. Louis in the news – with extensive media reports describing protests and community calls for justice.

Some of us have participated in the protests and prayer meetings during this past week, as we did in Ferguson in 2014, and we have witnessed a reawakening of community and interracial dialogue, as well as a growing commitment to transform the economic and law enforcement systems in this city. In the tradition of Jesus and the prophets, we believe that the recent protests are lifting up the unjust police practices and racial profiling that the Stockley decision represents to many of our citizens. As people called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God, we find ourselves having the hard conversations in our pews, joining our neighbors to march in the streets, organizing with ecumenical and community partners, and meeting with public and elected officials, to do that holy work of justice. To help be a part of bringing change to our city and region.

Rather than deterring us from inviting you to our city, the creative turbulence and divine disruption in our streets has reinforced our commitment to welcome the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly to St. Louis. We are eager to engage the PC(USA) in honest and direct conversations about racism, and the systems that divide us economically and politically in this country.

St. Louis is by no means alone in struggling with what it means to be an inclusive and just community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Urban, suburban and rural, North, West or South, gay straight and other, Black, Brown, Yellow, Mixed and White – all of us are learning how to become the beloved community, a reality which Jesus lived and died and rose again to create.

Please join us!

Grace and Peace,

The Rev. Craig Howard,  
Transitional Presbytery Leader  
Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy

The Rev. Erin Counihan  
Moderator, Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy  
Pastor, Oak Hill Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Vanessa Hawkins  
Designated Associate Presbytery Leader  
Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy

The Rev. Cedric Portis  
COLA Co-Chair  
Pastor, Third Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Carol DeVaughan  
COLA Co-Chair

The Rev. Susan Andrews  
Moderator 215<sup>th</sup> General Assembly  
COLA Steering Committee  
Interim Pastor, Second Presbyterian Church

Jennifer Pitcher  
Executive Coordinator Local Arrangements

The Rev. Clyde Crumpton  
Pastor, Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church