



# A Pastoral Letter to the Presbytery of Ohio Valley

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In my travels around the presbytery this year, preaching here and there, I've noticed that when it comes to pulpits, one size does not "fit all." On a good day, I come in at five feet, three inches, and so sometimes I have trouble seeing and being seen.

Years ago, while serving as a solo pastor, I had the same problem in my own church. When the sanctuary was built in the 1950's, the pastor was a rather tall man. Because he was so well-loved and because the people wanted him to stay forever, they built a rather tall pulpit. When he retired, other rather tall pastors followed. Then I came along.

I mentioned the problem to a friend of mine, and he said he had just the solution. We went to his father's farm, and in the barn there was a sturdy box, just the right height. "Here," he told me. "This is an old feedbox, and Dad said you could have it."

I stood on that feedbox every Sunday, preaching the Gospel. And then one Christmas Eve, it occurred to me how appropriate it was for me to do so, for that's where the story of Christmas takes place. *Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.* I imagined a cow sniffing around for its dinner of hay, surprised to find a baby swaddled inside.

God chose the ordinary to cradle the sacred.

*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us . . .* Each year we gather in our houses of worship to hear the story all over again: the story of a poor young couple who make their way to an ancestral town and bring into the world the Ancient of Days, of angels who travel from heaven to sing for a field of sheep, and of shepherds who leave their sheep and race to see a newborn baby sleeping in the cattle's feedbox. It is the elegant, mystical story of Immanuel: God-with-us, and from us and among us and for us.

It is a story we know by heart, yet long to hear over and over again. And it is a story that draws us in, inviting us to be more than listeners. It is a story that invites us to participate. The angels are singing to *us*. They call *us* to make haste and to see this thing that has come to pass. And when we do, how can we not bend our knees at the manger? How can we not make known to all the sayings which have been told us concerning this child? How can we not glorify and praise God for all we have heard and seen?

We are a part of this mystical story. It is *our* story, for it is our form, our flesh, that the Word of God becomes. God chose the ordinary to cradle the sacred. And God chooses us, again and again, to be a part of this story. God chooses us to bear the Word into a world that longs to believe that all is not lost.

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In my travels around the presbytery this year, I have enjoyed bringing greetings and sharing the words of our mission statement: *God's purpose for us is to be a transforming community of churches sharing the Light of Christ with the world.* I pray that we will find new ways to share that Light in the coming year, that we will do so with renewed energy, and that we will understand this work to be our true work, our true mission.

I wish you much light and love this season, and in the year to come!

Susan