Introduction: This is Us

Teaching Elder Gregory J. Bentley and Ruling Elder Elona Street-Stewart stand together as candidates for Co-Moderators of the 224th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Gregory Bentley is pastor of Fellowship Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama, and is endorsed by the Presbytery of North Alabama. Street-Stewart is synod executive for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and is endorsed by the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area.

Street-Stewart and Bentley both cite their own heritage and the dramatic influence of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on their lives, and on those like them, as the foundation of their desire to serve the wider church with “a hope that combines faith and justice into a life of service. Our personal experiences teach so much about who we are, and they are key to building relations across the church, across our differences, across our experiences through the hope of the Matthew 25 initiative,” Street-Stewart observed. “We believe it will take all that we are, individually and collectively, to continue to take on the important work God has for the PCUSA to do.”

“I am very excited about partnering with Elona,” Bentley said. “Together, we embody both the pain of our collective past and the possibilities of a preferred future…a future of vitality and fruitfulness in the church. God is doing a new thing in the PCUSA and I am grateful to be a part of it.” Adds Street-Stewart, “What we talk about in the church today, what challenges us in society today, are not just issues, but people and relationships. Our opportunity today is to personify what the gospel is about, for all the people it is about.”

For both Street-Stewart and Bentley, that includes a deep embrace of the church’s Matthew 25 initiative. In approaching the cultural-geographic-political differences across diverse communities, the two ask, how might we better recognize the diversity and mutuality of gifts around us? “We live in a world house,” Bentley says, to which Street-Stewart adds, “We’re woven together, interdependent, our lives and futures tied to one another, across the generations into the future.”

The personal stories of Bentley and Street-Stewart have shaped the inclusive message they will bring to the role of co-moderator. “God has used the Presbyterian Church in a mighty way to mold and shape me into the person God created and called me to be,” Bentley recalls. “At a time when the state of Alabama was only required to provide for schooling up to the fifth grade, my maternal grandmother, Virginia B. Howze, was able to finish high school because of a mission school founded by the (then-) Northern Church. My mother, Juanita B. Hattaway graduated from the only Historically Black College founded by the (then-) Southern Church, Stillman College, of which I am an alum as well. It was the PCUSA that taught me how to blend head and heart, to nurture the ‘learning and the burning.’”

Street-Stewart is a descendent of the Delaware Nanticoke tribe, whose ancestral home was just across the Chesapeake Bay from the convention center in which the 224th General Assembly will be held. “Even before becoming Presbyterian, this church nurtured me, welcomed me, educated me and encouraged my voice. It is through these decades of service that my voice, and with me the voices of ‘All my Relations,’ emerged to speak from truths often overlooked. Gregory and I represent the people who have been a part of this church from the beginning—but often not in roles that have allowed them to bring their full selves.” If elected with Bentley, Street-Stewart would be the first Native American moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).