

**Commission on Ministry Report on  
Rolling Hills Presbyterian Church and the Rev. Dr. Ted Pierce  
November 17, 2018**

In May 2016, a Bridge Committee consisting of Rolling Hills Presbyterian Church (RHPC) congregants, session members, staff, and members of the Commission on Ministry (COM) of Heartland Presbytery (HP) was formed. The committee worked for over a year to address problems in the relationship between HP and RHPC and to review the initial action of the congregation to select its Associate Pastor, TE Ted Pierce, as its next pastor. Throughout this process, RHPC representatives made clear their strong commitment to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In response to the direction provided by the COM representatives on the Bridge Committee, the Rolling Hills congregation elected a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) that completed a national search. In May 2017, the PNC presented to the congregation and the congregation overwhelmingly approved the recommendation that Ted Pierce be elected the pastor/head of staff of RHPC. COM unanimously supported the recommendation brought to HP in September 2017 (*Book of Order* G-2.0504c). But the motion, which requires a 75% affirmative vote, failed.

It was clear that there was a long history of hurt between RHPC and HP. It was essential for COM to listen, mediate, and seek to restore the peace and unity of HP and RHPC. The Bridge Committee, including three members of COM, soon discovered that some members of RHPC and some from HP continued to carry deep pain and anger associated with past events. For whatever reason, no one had sought to bring healing or reconciliation to those who had been hurt. With divine guidance, a process was undertaken.

This is the summary report from the Bridge Committee to the RHPC session presented at their stated meeting on October 15, 2018. The Rev. Tom Young (H.R.) serves as chair of the Bridge Committee.

*Committed to the rehabilitation of peace, unity, healing, and reconciliation, the Bridge Committee, consisting of members of RHPC and the COM, launched a listening process for the presbytery. We invited thirty-four people from a list compiled by COM, Ted Pierce, and Rolling Hills (twenty-nine teaching elders and five ruling elders, seventeen females and seventeen males) to share a conversation with teams of visitors from the Bridge Committee. Each listening team was composed of representatives of RHPC and the COM. We hoped these listening meetings would be an effective way to learn from those who have concerns and to share with them the positive relationship Rolling Hills members have with Ted. The meetings began on March 22 and concluded on July 6. The meetings were concluded with a positive attitude and a goal of moving forward with healing.*

*In response to this process, Rolling Hills:*

- *is paying its full per capita assessment.*
- *continues to send a full slate of commissioners to Heartland Presbytery meetings.*
- *is providing use of its facilities for the GROW event.*
- *will host a Presbytery meeting in 2020.*
- *affirms that the Rev. Dr. Ted Pierce remains a member in good standing of Heartland Presbytery and actively serves on two of its committees.*

*Rolling Hills members and clergy look forward to a healthy, active, and participatory relationship with Heartland Presbytery.*

As the process unfolded, COM was profoundly encouraged by the empathy and sincere regret expressed by members of HP and RHPC for a history including times of unity and times of disunity. The relationship between the presbytery and all of its churches requires and deserves dedicated work for the purpose of healing and reconciliation whenever and wherever division occurs. COM observed that genuine reconciliation can only come through truth-telling and transparency. Conversations with persons from HP reminded us that we are all children of God and that, when we hurt one another, we need to extend and receive forgiveness. COM reaffirms that it is the “mechanism” of the presbytery that serves as pastor, counselor, and advisor to its pastors and congregations (*Book of Order* G-3.0307).

As health is being restored and celebrations of the work of RHPC, Ted Pierce, and HP are plentiful, COM presents the following:

**COM moves that Heartland Presbytery “determine that its mission strategy permits the Rev. Dr. Ted Pierce to become the next installed pastor/head of staff at Rolling Hills Presbyterian Church.”**

This action in no way abrogates the contractual support provisions included in the original call to Ted to serve RHPC that was approved by HP on September 18, 2010.

COM will conduct a brief examination of Ted specifically related to his continuing sense of call to serve as pastor/head of staff at RHPC. When the examination is “arrested,” discussion of the motion will proceed. Statements from RHPC commissioners and commissioners from throughout the presbytery will be encouraged.

When the presbytery is ready to vote, only authorized commissioners will participate in the written ballot (75% or 3/4<sup>ths</sup> of commissioners “present and voting” is required for approval). Ballots will be distributed at registration to the teaching elders and ruling elders who are commissioners to the meeting of HP on November 17, 2018.

HP and its COM are committed to pray for RHPC and to invite members of the congregation to bring their skills and insights to the work of the presbytery’s committees and commissions.

*To the one who is able to protect us from falling,  
and to present us blameless and rejoicing before God’s glorious presence,  
to the only God our savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
belong glory, majesty, power, and authority,  
before all time, now and forever. Amen.*

Jude 24-25, CEB