

One of nationâ??s first, ordained female Presbyterian ministers canâ??t stop doing what she thinks is right

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Every Thursday afternoon before 5 p.m., the Rev. Glenda Hope picks up her Black Lives Matter sign and walks over to Geneva Avenue for her weekly vigil. Within a few minutes, neighbors and friends arrive, hoisting their signs. While some drivers honk, most do not. â??Still, it makes a difference,â?• she said.

Hope has devoted her life to doing what she thinks is right and has no intention of stopping: â??Christians are called upon to change the societal structures which inflict harm on people and the rest of Godâ??s Creation.â?•

She is joined in her vigil by her many friends and neighbors from the Cayuga Community Connectorâ??s program, which recently celebrated its eight-year anniversary. Each had their own reasons for being there. But like Hope, and despite the cold, the wind and rain, all are committed to eradicating systemic racism.



Cayuga Connector Vigil â?? **Every Thursday at 5PM-6PM** beginning at San Jose and Geneva and stretching out a safe 6â?² apart wearing masks. Make your own sign. A piece of cardboard works well. â??*Remember that the history-making Montgomery Bus Boycott saw hundreds of people â?? young and old â?? walking everywhere every day for 380 days. One grandmother said: â??my soles are weary but my soul is at rest. I am doing this for my grandchildren.â?? So are we.*â?•

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Glenda Hope

Hope was ordained in the â??60s. It was a time of questioning and churches were not immune. She took a non-traditional path, focusing on the cityâ??s outcasts and its most troubled neighborhood. She founded the Tenderloin AIDS Network, the Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center as well as a youth ministry. She also fought for family housing and various safe centers with supportive services.

â??I donâ??t like being powerlessâ??

Glenda Hope was born and raised in Atlanta, Ga. Though she is an adamant advocate for the downtrodden, she still maintains those Southern manners that put even potential opponents at ease. â??I simply want to be remembered as an evangelical Christian. I refuse to cede that designation to those preaching judgment, condemnation, wrath, and division. To me it means someone trying to proclaim Godâ??s Inclusive Love in word and deed.â?•

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Hope entered Florida State University hoping to pursue a career as a gym teacher, but knee problems quickly crushed that dream. She was drawn to religious service in her senior year in college, and in 1960 completed a masterâ??s degree in the English Bible at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education.

After going on to serve as the lay ministerial staff on two college campuses, then hospital chaplain and director of Christian Education in a large church in East Point, Ga., Hope set her sights on ordination. It was the mid-60s, and while Hope was ready**,** churches were not.

â??I was ready to move on,â?• Hope said. â??Non-ordained church staff have no power. I donâ??t like being powerless.â?•

When the Presbyterian Church U.S. agreed to ordain women, Hope moved quickly, becoming the first Presbyterian woman in the state of Georgia to be accepted as a candidate for the ministry. In 1969, she received a Master of Divinity degree from the San Francisco Theological Seminary, making her the first Presbyterian clergywoman in northern California. She also married Scott Hope, a professor she met on a blind date.

Tending to the Tenderloin

Since then, she has been advocating for the undervalued and underserved:

- She founded the San Francisco Network Ministries, a gathering of unchurched young adults who met in her home.
- The Ministries opened a coffeehouse as a safe place off the streets, offering nighttime Bible study, informal counseling, and a free computer center.



Hope in 1991.

- Daily, drop-in Listening Posts in the computer center and at a local hotel drew people out of isolation and depression into a caring community.
- With funding from the city, banks and private funders, the Ministries built a five-story, 38-apartment, family building on Ellis Street, with services for children, the community and intervention in domestic violence.
- Three years later, the city awarded the Ministries a building and funding for an 18-month, residential program for homeless women who have been prostituted and sex-trafficked. SafeHouse is expanding now under the leadership of one of its graduates, who lives in Hopeâ??s house.
- When the 7th Avenue Presbyterian Church in the Sunset District arranged for Network Ministries to become their part-time pastoral team, she led the denomination in ordaining LGBT people as congregational leaders. Church members joined the Tenderloin ministry and welcomed residents into their church.

Hope has received many awards and three honorary doctorates for her work in the Tenderloin. The Dalai Lama deemed her and others in San Francisco â??An Unsung Hero of Compassion,â?• while a San Francisco Chronicle headline referred to her as â??the saint of the Tenderloin.â?• But the one she treasured most came from the Tenderloin Times, â??For nurturing the spirit of the poor and advocating with them for change.â?•

Before retiring in 2014 to begin a new chapter in her life, Hope began organizing her outer Mission/Cayuga neighborhood. Though she had lived in her home for decades, she realized she did not know her neighbors. Successful aging, Hope believed, is â??having friends who care about you and

you for them, with whom you engage in healthful, fun things such as regular exercise, potlucks, and holiday/birthday celebrations.

Fostering resilience

â??Friends with whom you rejoice in happy times and whom you support in hard times. Friends and guides who help you reflect on your life purpose â?? the foundation, the guiding principle of your life and find ways to more fully actualize that in the present and future.â?•

So, Hope walked the streets and knocked on doors, inviting neighbors to join her for a game night. It quickly became evident they wanted to get to know one another.

Her advice to others: â??Do not refuse invitations, and do not eat over the sink.â?•



Friends and neighbors join Hope, far right, in celebrating her recent 85th birthday. (Photo by Judy Goddess)

With a growing base of neighborhood supporters, Hope got her district supervisor at the time to allocate start-up funds for a Community Connectors program, with the San Francisco Community Living Campaign as fiscal sponsor. Additional funding followed and a â??connectorâ?• was hired to oversee the program, which grew and ultimately received national attention as low-cost, innovative way to reach and support the isolated elderly.

In between her neighborhood actions, Hope also assumed the presidency of the San Francisco branch of the Older Womenâ??s League, a national network supporting research and education to help women midlife and later build resilience.

â??Resilience,â?• she said, quoting local geriatrician and â??Elderhoodâ?• author Louis Aronson, is â??about contentment and the happiness born of connection, meaning and purpose. â?¦ It requires knowing what matters most to you, being clear with others about your priorities, and living in an environment that meets your needs.â?•

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And for Hope thatâ??s as varied as standing on Geneva Avenue with a Black Lives Matter sign for an hour a week, encouraging neighborhoods to build community, seeing that the less fortunate are cared for or that older women are not left behind. â??I do what I think is right and give it to God to do with it as She chooses.â?•

Category

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