

*During the chapel service Wed., Nov. 10, the Rev. Dr. Andrew Purves, professor of Reformed theology, remembered the life and legacy of Susan Nelson, former professor at PTS.*

Susan Nelson began her work at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary one year after I came here, so, more or less, we grew up together as the youngest members of the faculty. Susan and I certainly found different voices to listen to, and often we debated matters of faith and theology. In her later years among us, though, we found a gentle and affectionate friendship that sustained us both. We would chat in the car park often, parting with a hug and a sense of pleasure in our relationship.

Susan had a theological intuition that led her to enquire after God in life's messy places. She listened to voices from the edge. She exposed her students to situations and texts that pushed them into places they would rather not go. She accepted that theology should speak truth to the evil that denied the fullness and blessedness of life for so many people, that refused to listen to their voices and hindered their aspirations for justice. As a teacher she excelled, preferring a dialogical and conversational style over the didactic lecture. Her students could disagree with her, while warmly embracing her commitments and passions. She was a professor of theology who undoubtedly left a life-long impression on her students. She invited thinking, engagement, and commitment.

Susan was a theologian in and for the church. She served on the committee that wrote the Brief Statement of Faith. She preached regularly and celebrated the sacraments. She taught in our congregations. She counseled her students in ways of faith and faithfulness, and exercised a pastoral presence and availability for many.

Susan always struck me as a courageous person, as a fighter for what she believed, and as one committed for the long haul. She could be feisty. Yes, she could be feisty. And she held her convictions deeply, with palpable emotion. She was a conscience among us, even, maybe

especially, when some of us disagreed with her. Her passion sometimes could not be contained. Her vulnerability and transparency were convicting in service of her longing for justice and social righteousness.

Susan was a woman of God. And allowing that she would speak of God in terms that stretched those of us of more conventional theological language, she loved the Lord and served the Lord, and bore witness I think especially to the truth of Matthew 25:40, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Over these last years and days, we have prayed and waited as Susan bravely faced the evil disease that took her life. But while with the Psalmist we confess that “weeping may linger for the night,” and in that regard our hearts go out to David and her children, we confess too that “joy comes with the morning.” In the Spirit who binds us to our Lord Jesus, we commend Susan to the Father in his name, confident in the hope of resurrection to eternal life, when God will wipe away every tear. And with the church universal, we too are bold to pray: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!