

Devotions and Invocation
Opening Meeting of 94th Ohio State Convention
Friday, June 3, 2022
Rev. Dr. Peggy Streiff, Chapter BW

Good evening, Sisters! How wonderful to be together to celebrate our Sisterhood in Ohio!

During this year, Our President, Jan Hornack, has encouraged us to carry our P.E.O. story forward. Think with me about the stories of some historic women who are examples of the virtues which we seek to embody in our P.E.O. experience. Perhaps they will offer us direction for our work together.

Before our initiation, we each declared that we, P.E.O.s are women of FAITH. One of the many biblical women who inspire us is Priscilla. She dedicated her whole life to the practice of her faith. She did not compartmentalize her faith and her work with her husband Aquila. They lived in Rome until 49 A.D. when Roman Emperor Claudius issued an edict banning Jewish assemblies in Rome. Jews and Christians were forced to leave Rome in order to be able to gather for worship. Priscilla and Aquila moved to Corinth and later to Ephesus where they supported themselves weaving goats' hair and sewing tents. They were both from families of financial means and thus, were well educated. They spent their whole life together taking risks, practicing the trade they knew and sharing their beliefs with others. In order to move forward, P.E.O.'s have to utilize the educations that we have been given, to use the tools we have at hand and be willing to take risks to share our faith.

Many of you know the story of Ruth and Naomi. Naomi was Ruth's Mother-in-Law. Their loving bonds were so strong that in spite of their different cultures, they stayed together through the loss of spouses and many other challenges. Their story gives us courage to love one another as Sisters, daughters, daughters-in-law, mothers, grandmothers, aunts and friends. A loving concern is not only our calling for each sister. But a loving concern for the world is the yoke we wear as people of LOVE who move forward with compassion.

Our film culture has influenced little girls to want to become Disney Princesses. Royal Watching is a favorite sport of the media, and many among us! Certainly, the celebration of Queen Elizabeth II's 70 years on the throne of Britain underscores the devotion and the perseverance required to be a leader with longevity and impact.

I want to turn our attention to a royal lady whose story is filled with wisdom and courage. Her PURITY of purpose allowed her to be the leader for a very important time in history. Queen Esther became Queen of Persia, not only for her physical beauty but also for her good mind, kindness, and teachable spirit. In the crisis that followed, when her Jewish people were threatened, she put herself in potential peril, went before the King and asked for the safety of the people. She was able to rise above all thoughts of herself and seek the common good. She taught us that leadership is about discerning the right time, embracing a pure spirit and being steadfast in our responsibilities as we trust in the future.

Indigenous women of the Maskoke People speak of the injustices done to their people. These range from displacement and genocide to negative stereotyped imagery in media and sports. Thankfully, the Cleveland Guardians have addressed one of these long overdue issues in our midst. Still, our Native American brothers and sisters are plagued with high rates of drug abuse, domestic violence, alcoholism and suicide. Life is not JUST when it is JUST for some, but it must be JUST for all. The gun violence in the news this week has heightened our desire for a new movement forward toward a civil society that is able to protect its children and others who are vulnerable.

Micah 6:8 - calls us “to do JUSTICE, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” We P.E.O.s, who claim to be educated women, cannot put our head in the sand when we are faced with SO many injustices before us.

TRUTH becomes evident to us in many ways. Some of you may have seen the recent movie, “Belfast”, which shared the portrait of one family during that city’s conflicts. Last October, it was my privilege to be in Ireland with a tour group of 18 people. While in Belfast we witnessed the wall filled with graffiti which still stands between the Protestant and Catholic Communities of that city from “the Troubles” 30 years ago. I took a number of pictures of the graffiti that spoke to me. One I came across recently said this: **“Now is a time to put your feet down differently and look forward.”** simply signed “Beth”.

Wherever there is conflict, whenever there is injustice and struggle, whenever we take on new challenges, we P.E.O.s can **set the direction** in our homes, in our communities, in our Chapters, in our houses of worship and at our places of work by the direction of our feet. May we never be afraid to “set our feet down differently”. For on the horizon, the great expectations of TRUTH that we seek may be fulfilled.

Let us pray,

Most gracious and eternal God, we pause in conscious recognition of your Presence with us. We come together for this annual gathering with hope that we shall write a story that moves us forward into new avenues of service and education for ourselves and others. As we live the next chapter of our Ohio story, give us openness to diverse people who join us along the way. May the virtues of P.E.O. - FAITH, LOVE, PURITY, JUSTICE and TRUTH - keep before us the light of our Star that illuminates our paths. Help us to glean wisdom from the stories of our foremothers and forefathers. May we be your people and your leaders for such a time as this. AMEN.