

FPC – November 11, 2018

Two hours ago at Washington National Cathedral in Washington, DC, a Sacred Service began in remembrance of World War I and in honor of the American men and women who lost their lives in the conflict. One hour ago, the bells of the National Cathedral rang 21 times. An hour ago, in Philadelphia, the National Park Service rang the Centennial Bell twenty-one times, with the Liberty Bell, situated nearby, standing witness as the Honorary Bell of Peace. The ringing of the “Bells of Peace” is a commemorative effort by the United States World War I Centennial Commission, the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, the Society of the Honor Guard of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the American Legion, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Americans are asked to toll the bells twenty-one times throughout the land at exactly 11:00 AM to remember the signing of the Armistice, to honor the dead, and to share the postwar hopes for a better world.

At 11:00 AM local time, 15,000 individuals, more than 100 cities, counties, and towns across the U.S., and all military services on all U.S. ships and military installations, and over 700 organizations, will toll the bells. Governors of all 50 states, the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Governors of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are asking citizens to toll the bells. Bells will be tolled in communities across the nation, in places of worship, schools, town halls, public carillons, and cemeteries, to mark the centennial of the Armistice that brought an end to hostilities, in what Americans fervently hoped had been “The War to End All Wars.” This nationwide program is designed to honor those 116,516 American men and women who served one hundred years ago, during World War One. The war ended by an armistice agreement between the warring countries at 11 a.m. on November 11th, 1918.

In a few minutes, it will be our turn to ring First Presbyterian Church’s bourdon twenty-one times. As a remembrance of our participation of this nationwide commemoration, we have received a certificate that will be displayed in the carillon room. Ringing the Bells of Peace at First Presbyterian Church is a historic event for several reasons. First, the Memorial Carillon was conceived and executed specifically to honor the service of the men and women of Madison County in World War I and World War II. Second, the

carillon's execution by the French Paccard & Fils firm in Annecy, bring us closer to one of the United States' most enduring allies, France. Third, many men and women from our church participated in the war. Madison County enlisted 1,868 men. 48 died, and 55 were wounded. While I have found no evidence of any First Presbyterian Church member having died in combat on the Western Front, one Hamilton Conger is familiar to us as a distant cousin of Bob Conger. Several Presbyterian women were active in the Jackson Mc Claran Chapter of the American Red Cross: Annie Rhea Dabney, Nell Benton Edenton, Evelyn Percy Pearson, Mary Sue Tigrett, and Irma Black Tomlin.

World War I lasted four years, from July 28, 1914 until November 11, 1918. When the guns fell silent, the devastation in Europe was immense. The war made between 37 and 40 million casualties. 21 million wounded; 8.5 million dead soldiers; close to 10 million dead civilians; 7.8 million missing. Cities lay in ruins, entire villages had disappeared from the map, industries, roads, and railroads had been destroyed. Along the Western front, forests and hills were leveled, and agricultural land was pockmarked by repeated bombings. One hundred years later, soldiers' remains still rise to the surface to be identified and reburied.

The United States' involvement from April 6, 1917 until November 11, 1918 was critical at many levels. Its valorous military actions at Cantigny, Belleau Wood, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne, its unprecedented humanitarian work, and its massive war loans helped win "the war that changed the world". The dedication and generosity of millions of American citizens who rallied to support their soldiers through food, medical supplies, clothing, and many other gifts, must not be forgotten. The soldiers who died during their service in France must not be forgotten. We must always remember and honor those who sacrificed to the cause of peace, democracy, and freedom.

Prayer by Rev. John White