

Update for June 25, 2016 - Day 8

CLOSING PLENARY

With a flurry of “business” completed through the day and into the night on Friday, Saturday morning brought a “calm” to the General Assembly. The commissioners and those who resourced them had worked hard for seven straight days. Although there was a final session to be completed, it was a much anticipated celebration with reports and a closing worship service.

In review of the actions of the General Assembly, the GA COMMITTEE presented the impact upon the per capita in upcoming years. While the per capita in 2016 remains at \$7.12, for 2017, it will require a 38 cent increase, followed by an 18 cent increase for 2018.

In addition, assembly actions added \$282,744 in 2017 and \$162,500 in 2018 to the Presbyterian Mission Agency budget, over and above the proposed budgets of \$63,530,297 in 2017 and \$63,450,591 in 2018. These increases result from the specific actions taken by the 2016 General Assembly. The Presbyterian Mission Agency is funded from mission gifts provided by congregations and presbyteries. Consequently, Tony De La Rosa, (Interim Executive Director) made an appeal to the Assembly for their financial support and solicitation among their congregations.

Tony also reported on the progress of the 1011 Worshipping Communities initiative. Currently, there are 344 active worshipping communities, but more importantly were some of the demographics that he shared about who the participants are:

64% are under 40

53% are racial/ethnic members

78% are “new” to the PCUSA

71% of the presbyteries have at least one new worshipping community

In anticipation of the 223rd General Assembly (June 16-23, 2018) to be held in St. Louis, Missouri, the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy offered a video presentation and welcome to their city. If you really want to plan ahead, you might want to know that the 224th (2020) General Assembly will be in Baltimore and the 224th will be in Columbus, Ohio.

In many ways, this General Assembly has been different from many of the past. While we will continue to “sort out” and reflect over the next few months upon what has transpired in these intense days, this gathering was transitional. For the first time in many years, it was not dominated by the discussion and debate for issues of sexuality. While there were certainly issues of passion and difference within the assembled

commissioners, the conflict never seemed to result in clear polarization between “winners” and “losers.” Of course, votes were taken and some positions prevailed, while other failed, but the “tone” was not so divisive.

With this General Assembly, there were transitions in leadership. For the first time, co-moderators were elected. A new stated clerk was elected to succeed Gradye Parsons who had served for eight years. These elected leaders also signify changes in the diversity of leadership within our own denomination.

Another significant step was realized with the adoption of the Confession of Belhar. Written within the context of apartheid in South Africa, this addition to our Book of Confessions represents a commitment to unity in the Church that transcends barriers of race. By its inclusion, we also will have one of the confessions that originates from a different part of the world than Europe or North America.

Some actions that were taken (constitutional changes) will require approval by the presbyteries and will become part of the discussion over the next year or two. Others may be lesser known, but do signify the revision or approval of overtures that began with a presbytery over the past two years. Some of those statements reflect policies, while others represent public statements.

In all of these actions, those gathered as commissioners at the 222nd General Assembly sought God’s leading and guidance. In our trust in the Lord’s sovereignty, we believe and trust in God’s providence in directing our paths through this collective discernment and decision making process.

Through it all, your Redstone commissioners were diligent in their work leading up to the assembly and throughout the many, many committee meetings, sessions, and presentations. As a group who were willing to serve the Lord, the PCUSA, and Redstone Presbytery, we owe them our gratitude. Personally, I hope that you will join me in thanking each of them as you have the opportunity.

Ms. Bernice Adams, Ruling Elder

Rev. Colleen Molinaro, Teaching Elder

Rev. Curtis Paul, Teaching Elder

Ms. Mandi Pascarella, YAAD

Mr. Tom Shipley, Ruling Elder

The 222nd General Assembly theme was based upon the “Hope in Our Calling” taken from Ephesians 1:18-19. Throughout this Assembly, commissioners, participants, and even Executive Presbyters have wrestled with its meaning. Whether in plenary debates, long committee meetings, challenging presentations, or inspiring worship, the “eyes” of our heart have been enlightened and that “Hope” has become known a little better this week.

“So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe...”(Ephesians 1:18-19; NRSV)