

# 222nd General Assembly

Worship and Work of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the General Assembly Council

## Overview—What is GA? Why do we have it?

**The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the whole church, it shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304). (Book of Order; G-3.0501)**

Within our Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, distinctive features have included both theological emphases and our polity. One of the key principles of our polity is that we are led and governed by groups of ruling and teaching elders as they gather together for prayer, discernment and action. This is true at all levels of the church, whether in your session, our presbytery, the synod or the General Assembly.

As a national meeting, the General Assembly gathers together to set priorities for the church as a whole, to promote our national and international mission and ministry whether in renewal or in justice and to consider revisions in our constitution and in our practices. While most of the attention post-General Assembly is given to the particular actions or “business items,” good portions of the meetings involve fellowship, worship, and hearing reports and updates on the ministry and mission of the church.

## Overtures “from the people”

Those items that are considered by this gathered body come from the “ground up” within our denomination. Particular persons may approach their own sessions about presenting an overture. If endorsed by the session, it would be considered by the local presbytery. Overtures that receive presbytery approval and also receive a concurrence from another presbytery are submitted and considered by the General Assembly. Between when the overture is submitted and the GA meeting, it is reviewed

for comments by relevant groups and for financial implications. Upon review, it is delegated to a particular committee of the General Assembly. Each commissioner who attends General Assembly is assigned to one of the committees to review and revise, amend or approve/disapprove each overture. Coming out of each committee, each overture as acted upon by the committee is considered by the entire General Assembly as either part of the consent or action agenda. Any overtures that pass that require an amendment to the constitution (Book of Order or Book of Confessions) will also return to the individual presbyteries for a vote of ratification or not.

### **Who are these commissioners? How do they decide?**

Each presbytery elects commissioners to the General Assembly with equal number of ruling and teaching elders. In the Presbytery of Redstone, we elected four commissioners (2 ruling elders, 2 teaching elders) based upon the provisions in our Presbytery Manual. We also elect a Young Adult Advisory Delegate who participates in a committee and on the floor of General Assembly with “voice,” but without a “vote” other than a collective “vote for advice” to the commissioners.

Although commissioners are elected from each of the presbyteries, they come to a General Assembly not as “representatives” of presbyteries. They come to seek God’s desires and will together as a gathered body with other commissioners and to act upon their consciences as the Lord leads them in response to the matters presented before them.

Any actions of the General Assembly are the result of voting by these commissioners who attend and participate from the presbyteries across the country. They are pastors and Sunday School teachers, presbyters and session members alike. In this biennial gathering, it is their decisions that constitute the actions of the General Assembly.