



***WORSHIP AND WORK OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
(USA) IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY COUNCIL***



222nd General Assembly---Day 5

"The Hope in our Calling" Ephesians 1:18

UPDATES AND REFLECTIONS

"The bad news is there are no maps for where we are in the Church today and where we are going.....The good news is there are no maps for where we are in the Church today and where we are going....therefore, we have to rely upon our God and upon each other in the body of Christ."

In one of the sessions that I attended today, the person introduced our time with the quote above. It reminded me of the book Canoeing the Mountains book that I have mentioned several times. The nature and rapidity of change in our world and for the Church no longer permit us to plan for the future based upon the patterns of the past.

Consequently, we must look to our God to lead us and direct us to where God has gone before us. We must look to who will we be as God's people together, hearing from one another, sharing our gifts with one another and growing together in Christ as congregations, as a presbytery and as a denomination.

PLENARY SESSIONS

**Church Gathering as a Whole
(through representative commissioners)**

Beginning the time with one of the "speak outs," small groups formed within the larger convention hall to engage in discussing the questions:

- 1. 1. In what ways have your views of the report's findings and insights changed during your time at the Assembly?**
- 2. 2. In what ways will your views of the report's findings and insights affect your consideration of the business before the Assembly?**

Even within the span of five days and because of the shared conversations during that time, commissioners (and others) find themselves thinking, rethinking and thinking again. Now, each will find himself/herself needing to make concrete decisions in hearing additional debate and voting on the overtures brought forward from the committees.

"BUSINESS" ACTIONS

Consent Agenda

In order to streamline business activity, an extensive "consent agenda" was presented. In order to be included on this consent agenda, overtures needed at least 75% approval rate within the committee voting. After commissioners requested the removal of eight items, the consent agenda was approved by voice vote with fifty-six items and reports included on that list.

Theological Seminaries

New seminary presidents were approved, including David Esterline who is serving as the President of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. The covenant with the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico was renewed (*on a side note, I visited this seminary as part of an accreditation team several years back and in another lifetime*).

A memorial minute was conducted by Rev. Craig Barnes in remembrance of the untimely death of Dr. Steven Hayner, former president of Columbia Theological Seminary. He emphasized Steve's recognition of the pursuit of grace that empowered him to live joyfully, even in the midst of cancer. The Committee on Theological Education also recognized Dr. Craig Dykstra(Lilly) and Dr. Katharine Sakenfeld(Princeton T.S.) for lifetime achievement of Excellence in Theological Education.

Directory of Worship

The Revised Directory of Worship was presented. The last major revision was in 1989, after the reunion. As part of the Book of Order, the document serves as a "compass" which helps us "navigate" between form and freedom in worship.

The revision seeks to integrate theology and practice as well as accommodating new changes in the church. Beginning with the

General Assembly in 2006, a directive for revision was offered. A first "draft" was presented in 2014 to the General Assembly. It was recommended for study and comment. In 2015, a second consultation generated a second draft which was presented to this General Assembly. A number of changes have been made including shortening the document while retaining central Reformed emphases.

Although amended in committee, the amended version was approved by the Assembly. Additional amendments were offered on the floor, with only a couple of them approved. As a Book of Order change, this Revised Directory of Worship will be presented for approval by a majority of presbyteries. I encourage you to read it and consider its usefulness for our future worship lives and practices.

Statements on Creation, Evolution and Science

An "Affirmation of Creation" was presented from the committee on Theological Issues and Institution. Some commissioners expressed the concern that some of the language was too specific. In a tallied vote, the statement passed (after several votes resulting from difficulty with the voting devices) in a close vote. The Assembly also voted to endorse the Clergy Letter Project and the Christian Clergy Letter expressing the view that "the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist."

Prayer for Persecuted Christians

In response to a commissioner's resolution, the Assembly approved by voice vote a call to pray for persecuted Christians within the world. At the conclusion of the vote, Juan Samarsiento led the congregation in prayer.

Belhar Confession

Many of you will recall that at the 2014 General Assembly passed the inclusion of the Confession of Belhar within our Book of Confessions. This confession focused on reconciliation and unity as both a "gift and obligation" for the church. It was written in the context of racial apartheid in South Africa.

As a revision to the Book of Confessions, such action also required approval by 2/3 of the presbyteries (achieved in 2015) and ratification by the next ensuing General Assembly (2016). The overwhelming vote today confirms this confession which will be included in the next publication of the Book of Confessions (2016). We were greeted and thanked and joined in celebration by the Godfrey Betha and Alan Boesak from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. As the Assembly broke out in song, it was an emotional moment throughout the convention hall.

CELEBRATING MINISTRY OF

STATED CLERK GRADYE PARSONS

Among other events at this General Assembly, there were several acknowledgements of the imminent retirement of Gradye Parsons. Tonight, I was privileged to attend a dinner celebrating the ministry of this servant of Christ and the Presbyterian Church(U.S.A.). Additionally, Gradye was recognized by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations for his work as the ecumenical representative of the PCUSA and received an ovation from the Assembly.

While no doubt, there is some status in fulfilling such a role on a national stage, the reality is that in many ways it can be a "thankless" job where there is always somebody displeased no what you say or decide. In my own view, while I have not always agreed with him, I believe that Gradye has served the church well with grace and humility.

ECUMENICAL SERVICE

As an ecumenical service, we were privileged to hear the proclamation of the word from Bishop Reginald Jack, Prelate of the Twentieth District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. His message focused on the "conflicting voices" even among faith leaders. Rev. Jack called for us as faith leaders to be faithful through prayer, to not be fooled by the numbers and continue to speak truth to power and to know God. As with each worship service within the Assembly, the Lord's Supper was celebrated.

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD MISSION

Earlier this morning, the Mid Council leaders(EP's and Stated Clerks) met together with some of the staff members of the Presbyterian World Mission. In that gathering, we shared best practices and innovations about the ways in which both local and world mission is promoted and implemented in presbyteries across the country. As a presbytery, we remain committed to supporting both shared and designated mission and to encourage congregations directly to engage in support and partnership with mission local, national and international.

So, I close this day's description of our work with a quote from the document, "Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership(2003)" that characterizes not only our understanding of mission, but our understanding of unity and being connected to one another(whether in this Assembly or with brothers/sisters around the world).

"We understand "Mission" to be God's work for the sake of the world God loves. We understand this work to be centered in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and made real through the active and leading power of the Holy Spirit. Recognizing our human limitations and because of our fundamental unity in Jesus Christ, we believe we are called to mission through the discipline of partnership....."

As heirs to God's grace in Jesus Christ, and joint heirs with all who confess him Lord, we affirm our place as Presbyterians in the whole Body of Christ, the Church. We give visible recognition of our belonging to one another as one denominational family. We give this recognition as Presbyterians through our connectional system of congregations, presbyteries, synods, General Assemblies and related institutions. The one table around which we gather is God's table and the one mission to which we are called is God's mission.....Whenever and wherever one engages in that mission, one bears witness to the saving love of God in Jesus Christ. Through this love, empowered by the Holy Spirit, all are made one. This unity is a gift of God's grace that extends across cultural, linguistic, economic and other barriers that divide us within the Body of Christ and across the human family."

"A Picture (or video) is Worth a Thousand Words" (select link below or for more pictures, see Presbytery of Redstone Facebook page)

[Everyone from Redstone, now reading Presbyterians Today](#)
[Her stuff, but no Mandi?](#)
[Standing ovation for Gradye](#)
[Ecumenical worship](#)
[We Shall Overcome--post- Belhar adoption](#)



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