



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



222nd General Assembly---Day 6

"The Hope in our Calling" Ephesians 1:18

UPDATES AND REFLECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

On this Thursday evening, the "business" of General Assembly continues to "roll on" with plenary sessions morning, afternoon and now into the late evening. These are the days when concentration on the part of commissioners becomes critical as one overture and issue follows upon another. While the structure of each session is well planned between reports and debates with separation of more controversial issues into different sessions.

Nonetheless, all of the commissioners remain in need of your prayers as they seek to be diligent in fulfilling their responsibilities on behalf of the church.

One of those commissioners, Colleen Molinaro(TE) offered her own remarks about impressions of the General Assembly.

"What a pleasure it is to experience the vast diversity among the members of our church, all the while serving one Lord. As a member of Ecumenical and Interfaith committee, I had the privilege to hear greetings from brothers and sisters from several countries in South America and Africa. The Spirit has been present in worship, plenary, and in committees. We concluded our work as a committee in the sharing of the Lord's Supper. Truly, the Church in action."

ECUMENICAL DELEGATES

As mentioned by Colleen, one of the highlights for me is the participation of the Ecumenical Advisory Delegates. Invited by the denomination to come and participate, I have had the opportunity to personally meet a few of these brothers and sisters and have been impressed that they have taken the time to become familiar with our Presbyterian polity and the issues in preparation for this General Assembly.

Additionally, there are ecumenical and international observers who have also come to this General Assembly to represent their home churches and to witness the discussions and actions of the PCUSA. At each plenary, there are greetings and an invocation offered by members of these other faith communities and we are the beneficiaries of their willingness to contribute to our gathering.

AGENCY REPORTS

Reports on some of the other agencies were presented this morning. They included the Presbyterian Investment Loan Program(PILP), Board of Pensions(BOP), Presbyterian Publishing, and Presbyterian Foundation. Sometimes, we can think of these as some distant group serving someone else, but each of these agencies has served our congregations or presbytery in some ways. Just some examples include;

- Westmont Presbyterian Church recently took out a loan(PILP).
- Redstone teaching elders who received emergency assistance grants(BOP).
- Presbytery investments in New Covenant Funds (Presbyterian Foundation).

- Apportionment increases for teaching elders, active or retired(BOP).
- Curriculum and books in our Resource Center (Presbyterian Publishing)

"BUSINESS" ACTIONS
(Just some of the many items considered/decided)

General Assembly Procedures

Some of the more mundane, but necessary matters approved included approving the location and date of the 225th General Assembly (June 25-July2; Columbus, Ohio). The Assembly elected Beth Hessel(TE) as Associate Stated Clerk. Beth is the Executive Director of the Presbyterian Historical Society.

Additional measures were taken to continue to ensure adequate representation in our agencies. New business also directed the provision of guidance on child protection policies and procedures.

Mid Council Issues

After much debate and numerous attempts at amending the proposal, the Assembly approved an alternative resolution from the committee on dependent care policy (as opposed to including it in the BOO). The assembly also voted to disapprove an overture that would have required development of a national child development policy. Last night, the child protection policy of the GA and its agencies was approved and could serve as a model to others.

In 2014, the General Assembly passed an overture urging synods to consider shared mission and boundaries in order to reduce to 10-12 synods (currently 16). After two years of meeting about mission, ministry and possible configurations, the synods came back with a report indicating that they did not see a way to change the boundaries without compromising the mission and ministry.

This year, an overture calling for a rescinding of that action was approved out of committee. A minority report was also presented on appointment of a group to consolidate synod boundaries. On the floor of the GA, the majority committee position was affirmed by a vote of 421-158. So, the current configuration and number of synods will remain for the foreseeable future.

The Way Forward

With the number of overtures submitted this year that either addressed major structural and procedural issues related to the functioning of the General Assembly or the two agencies of the Office of General Assembly(OGA) and Presbyterian Mission Agency(PMA), a new committee entitled "The Way Forward" was assigned the task of taking up these issues.

As a result, coming from the committee was a proposal created as "new business." This proposal called for a representative 2020 Vision Team. In an effort to address the sentiment of many of the concerns, this group was charged with the task of

Additionally, while acknowledging the hard work of many PCUSA staff, nevertheless there was a desire to address structural concerns and issues that were raised of the two agencies(OGA/PMA). The Committee proposed the appointment of an Administrative Commission who would both be able to conduct comprehensive analysis (including using an examination team), make recommendations and implement changes within the boundaries of the current constitution. Mission and structural changes that exceed that authority would be recommended to the next General Assembly. Included in the Administrative Commission will be the current co-moderators and the previous moderator/vice moderator.

No doubt, both of the above responses are attempts to simultaneously address immediate concerns of function, but also to address major questions of our time and how we might pursue "a way forward" as a national church. While acknowledging the great value the "Foothills overtures" provided in stimulating a comprehensive conversation on reform within the denomination, nonetheless, the Committee and the General Assembly believed that they addressed these proposals through the two above measures.

Mission Coordination

A commission resolution requesting the withdrawal from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice was disapproved in both the Committee and the plenary session of the General Assembly.

An overture from Pittsburgh Presbytery seeking a pilot project to address the plight of African-American males in targeted cities in the United States. This overture was affirmed by the Committee and approved by the General Assembly.

The Committee and the General Assembly approved an overture to establish a maximum ratio of 5:1 compensation from highest to lowest paid employees in the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

Social Justice

A number of initiatives intended to report on, educate and address issues of race, ethnicity and racism were passed by the Committee and the General Assembly.

As part of the process of pursuing reconciliation, an overture offering apology to Native Americans, Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians for dishonoring actions of the past and to seek forgiveness, healing grace and guidance in toward mutually respectful relationships was approved by the Committee and the General Assembly.

Other items were still being discussed and debated from this Committee as the commissioners worked into the night.....

Overall Perspective

While any one or more of these issues may not seem important to any one of us, nonetheless there are those for whom these concerns are significant. Within our church as we seek to serve and be faithful to Jesus Christ together, we hear from one another and respond collectively. In so doing, we sharpen each other to be open to what God is saying and doing among us even as the context and circumstances of our lives differ widely.

WORSHIP

Interrupting the Mid Council issues agenda in the morning, the Assembly paused in planned fashion to focus our attention in corporate worship. With beautiful music, both instrumental and vocal, our praises were lifted before our God. Using the "Good Samaritan" parable, the Rev. Alice Ridgill (Trinity Presbytery) challenged us to hear the call of Jesus to "neighbor" and to be "difference makers." As is our pattern in GA, we came to the Lord's Table to be fed and nourished by the grace of Jesus Christ.

MISSION CO-WORKERS

Hunter Farrell, Director of World Mission, told of a practice in Haiti where the words of honor and respect are communicated to one another as one comes to another's property. He spoke of the notions of honor and respect which form the rhythm of our partnership in mission.

In this way, mission co-workers are sent in partnership with the greeting of honor and received with respect. Eleven mission co-workers who were retiring from active mission service in the PCUSA were honored. Their dedication and service to the Lord through mission partnership service with other brothers/sisters around the world.

At the same time, nine new mission co-workers were commissioned to service as part of Presbyterian World Mission. A litany of commissioning was used to send out these mission co-workers in the name of Jesus Christ and on our behalf. In that litany, we promised to support them with prayer, encouragement and resources.

GA.....STILL TO COME?

While the coming together of the church in reunion and education is accomplished in other gatherings like "Big Tent," the General Assembly always consists of a mixture of policy and fellowship, legislation and mission, worship and education. Sometimes, agenda items don't go as efficiently as some would desire. Sometimes, people feel like we are too focused on the tasks at hand.

Although there was much "business" completed today, there remains much to be reviewed and decided. The Assembly will need to take up these matters expeditiously. I suspect that tomorrow will be another long day.

In any ecclesiastical meetings, there is a delicate balance between completing the items submitted for review, progress reports and the equally important times of fellowship and worship. Each of these type of activities exhibits God's grace among us, upon us and through us. Please continue to pray for us and for those responsible for the organization and implementation of the remaining components of this General Assembly.

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

Discussion and Debate at the Plenary

[Getting "Energized" at the General Assembly](#)
[Prayers Offered through Colored Ribbons on Cathedral Windows](#)
[General Assembly Bags](#)



Presbytery of Redstone | 1004 Mt. Pleasant Road | Greensburg | PA | 15601