



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



222nd General Assembly---Day 7

"The Hope in our Calling" Ephesians 1:18

UPDATES AND REFLECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

With a late night session followed by a morning session this morning, you would have thought that most people would be "dragging." As I entered the convention center meeting, I expected naturally to see commissioners entering with "dread" on what awaited them. Yet, no matter the lack of sleep, they filed in ready to take the charge, smiling and greeting their table mates as they arrived. Certainly, the coffee lines were longer, but the renewed energy was evident as they came to express the "hope of their calling."

Throughout the day and into the late evening again on Friday, the dedication and commitment of these commissioned volunteers is impressive. Their desire to serve Jesus Christ and their church in this way warrants the honor and respect of all of us.

"BUSINESS ITEMS"

Election of the Stated Clerk

After a period of speeches by both candidate, followed by questions posed from the floor of the Assembly. Both candidates spoke of their visions for the denomination as well as their previous experience that would qualify them. As a result, Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson was elected by a vote

of 447 to 112. J. Herbert noted that to "only think about the survival of the church is to set our aim too low." His reference was to the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus the Christ which transcends preservation of an organization. At the same time, he expressed hope for the PCUSA with the words of affirmation, "we are not dead, we are reforming."

Social Justice

Late in the evening on Thursday, the General Assembly considered an action initiated by the New York Presbytery of expressing an apology to the LGBTQQ as a result from past actions. The Committee disapproved that overture and instead offered an alternative resolution that changed the language from apology to regret over the pain caused to the those based upon sexual orientation. On Friday (next morning), there was a motion to reconsider the action and to restore "stronger" language, but this motion failed.

Church Polity and Ordered Ministry

The Church Polity and Ordered Ministry attempted to expedite matters by consolidating a number of their actions under a "consent agenda." A couple of these matters were "pulled," but the rest were approved. Those approved by consent included; being a little less prescriptive on ratios of teaching and ruling elders on committees of councils higher than sessions, addition of the Administrative Personnel to possible Certified Church Service and additional sections on Ecclesiastical Officers.

An overture was submitted and was approved by the Committee to change the labeling and language in the BOO from "teaching elder" back to "minister of word and sacrament." While there was an affirmation of the parity in the ordered ministry, there was discussion about the confusion that this caused our ecumenical partners. As a result, an amendment was included and passed to include both terms. This will be proposed to presbyteries for ratification.

In 2014, the GA passed a proposed revision in the Book of Order that made clear that a person who had "renounced jurisdiction" could not become part of a congregation and serve in a volunteer or paid capacity. As a BOO revision, it required approval of a majority of presbyteries which subsequently, it did receive.

In this GA, the Committee responded to an overture to rescind that action, by disapproving it, but offering additional language (06-07) that retained this, but provided the means by which restoration might occur. Their motion

failed in the General Assembly. After efforts to refer it to the next GA were defeated, language was approved that would require teaching elders who "renounce jurisdiction" during disciplinary proceedings to resubmit to the disciplinary process of the church in order to serve in voluntary or paid ministry under the jurisdiction of the PCUSA.

An overture to alter the BOO on preparation for ministry for seminaries to teach evangelism was disapproved by the Committee and the Assembly. There was a possible comment on the proposed, but it failed by just a few votes. Although there was substantial debate on the proposal from Synod of the Northeast concerning making clear the option of electing and commissioning ruling elders without necessarily participating in session. In the end, not only was the committee motion to disapprove not approved, neither was the original proposal from Northeast approved. Consequently, the Assembly referred the matter to the Committee on General Assembly for consideration.

Middle East Issues

A controversial area through several iterations of the General Assembly has revolved around issues in the Middle East. Although disagreements still remain on how to pursue peace and justice in this area as in the past, this General Assembly did pass some statements including advocating and witnessing for the human rights of children in Palestine and Israel.

Also, a theological and comprehensive statement and assessment on human values in the Middle East. This report prepared by Assembly Committee on Social Witness Policy was augmented by an amended preface including the ongoing affirmation of the two-state solution.

The Committee on Middle East recommended disapproval of an overture calling for a boycott of all HP products. This disapproval was confirmed by the General Assembly by an overwhelming vote.

Immigration and Environmental Issues

Approved by voice vote a collaborative agenda on environmental stewardship among the six agencies of the PCUSA. "Our Common Call to Care for God's Creation" notes the current practices, but also calls for additional action by both individuals and agency practices within the denomination.

Approval of the overture to revise G-1.0304 in the Book of Order under the category of the "Ministry of Members" to also include "Caring for God's creation" within this list of

faithful responsibilities. This constitutional change will be forwarded to presbyteries for voting in order to approve this change.

Of the more controversial items, the overture from San Francisco called for beginning the divestment from fossil fuel companies over the next three years while retaining a small investment for shareholder privilege. In a relatively close vote, the Committee had approved this overture. Yet, also coming out of the Committee was a minority report which focused on diversifying the investment portfolio within the energy sector. This Minority Report was amended to direct the MRTI continue an engagement process on climate change issues with corporations, particularly coal and gas companies and report back to the next General Assembly.

Peacemaking and International Issues

By consent, the Assembly affirmed the new vistas and realities possible with the new realities in the relationship between United States and Cuba. Looking forward to a free and open relationship between peoples and churches, the PCUSA rejoices at the prospect of deepening our communion with the La Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba(IPRC). The Assembly received greetings and comments from Daniel Izquierdo, General Secretary Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba.

Also, by consent, the Assembly received the "Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula" adopted by the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches(WCC) meeting in South Korea in November, 2013 and commend it for study and reflection. The Assembly also heard from Lee Hong Jung---General Secretary, Presbyterian Church of Korea.

Affirmed the historic means and particularly, the Presbyterian Church(USA) has engaged in nonviolent witness for the sake of identifying and calling a stop to forms of human oppression in American society and throughout the world.

At the conclusion of a six-year process, this General Assembly voted on the Peacemaking Affirmations as amended by the Committee. You might recall these five Affirmations that we deliberated on and gave comment during our Presbytery meeting last November. Some of the amendments address a few of the concerns that we had as well as others.

WORSHIP

In the midst of all our actions and declarations in this General Assembly, we were helpfully reminded of that foundational starting point of it all. Rev. Jerry Andrews drew our attention to the Pauline words that declare our reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ as announcement. Such pronouncements place our own reconciliation within the larger context of God's reconciling work in the world. We are privileged to be invited to participate in this work as God's co-workers, yet it is never dependent upon us. It is that vertical reconciliation that frames and motivates our reconciliation with each other and the world.

GROWING IN "GRACE AND GRATITUDE"

Certainly, each of us knows that it is our central desire to know and live by God's grace. We know that gratitude is our primary response to that saving, sustaining and sanctifying grace. Yet, as one small part of today's session, we heard a testimony of a young woman who was using the "Growing in Grace and Gratitude" curriculum with her 3rd-5th grade Sunday School class. Both in its theological substance and in the accommodating lesson plans, she testified firsthand of the stories of impact on these kids. If you have not checked out this curriculum for your kids, I would encourage you do so. It is available through the PCUSA store, as well as we have a sample copy in the Resource Center.

A COMPLETE ROTATION

In the Oregon Convention Center, suspended from the ceiling is a 750-pound ball attached to a pendulum cable. Labeled the Foucault Pendulum. In 1851, the French physicist discovered that a pendulum's swing plane would change according to the earth's rotation. It appears that pendulum is rotating, but actually the earth is rotating under it. The full 360 degrees varies according to the latitude at which the pendulum is located. In Portland, this rotation is accomplished in 33.5 hours.

When we began this journey, we began with great optimism. Yet, there were times during these past several days when it appeared the pendulum swung back and forth without really moving. As debates waned on, we could easily "tire" of hearing each other, but graciousness was the "norm" and was demonstrated on almost all occasions.

Slowly, but surely, the commissioners worked hard to exhibit and communicate their own commitments to participate in God's reconciling work in the church and in the world. At times, progress seemed noticeably absent. Yet, beneath all of our actions and conversations, the church rotated along moving the plane of the pendulum cable until the fullness of business was accomplished. When the

"business" was done, applause of relief and thanksgiving rang through the hall.

Tomorrow morning is reserved for closing worship before everyone departs for return flights home. Through these everyday updates, I have not been able to capture all of the moments and activities of this General Assembly, but you will be able to review the disposition of all overtures and action items through pc-biz.org.

With the "business" actions taken by this General Assembly having "wrapped up," I can testify that your prayers for our commissioners and others have been answered. The answers may not have always been reflected in votes that any one of us would have wanted or desired, but in the larger perspective, the "eyes" of their hearts were enlightened, to:

"know 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)

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

**[Gradye being congratulated](#)
[Prayer before fossil fuel debate](#)
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