

General Assembly Reports



General Assembly Commissioners

Bob Bell (Ruling Elder – First Perry)

Yvette Grant (Ruling Elder – Nueva Esperanza)

Alexandra (Sandra) Hedrick (Teaching Elder – Kirkwood / Stated Clerk)

Joe Medearis (Teaching Elder – Arlington / Peace)

Theological Student Advisory Delegate

Kevin Wright (Woodlawn)

Young Adult Advisory Delegate

Emma Cottrell (Community)

Bob Bell, Ruling Elder – First Presbyterian Church of Perry

I appreciate persons who can say what they are “gonna” say in a short sentence.

Here are some of the ones that I enjoyed the most:

“We have to fix ourselves before we try to become an example to the rest of the world.”

“When there is joy at the end of a decision...God is present.”

“Be mindful of the many needs of others, listening for where God is calling you to serve.”

“God manifests Himself through the unknown.”

“Help us to listen to your voice, give us your wisdom, pour out justice, let our hands, our feet be the voice of your work, hear our hearts, fill us with your Spirit, stir us to hear you.”

The last comment that I have is by Teaching Elder J. Herbert Nelson, who is the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly.

“God cannot be locked inside our buildings any longer, I don’t remember God having a church building.”

The experience was very enriching and was great to see more of the inside workings of the PCUSA.

Yvette Grant (Ruling Elder - Nueva Esperanza Presbyterian Church)

I have to begin thanking God for this beautiful opportunity given to serve as commissioner. We couldn't have given a better theme than as " From Lament to Hope" In the midst of a pandemic and racial unrest in our nation I was happy to know that our focus was in being an agent of hope. It was a time to mourn for the helpless and the sick to repent and take a deep look inside and allow God to stir from within the desire to lift up our voices and serve in whatever capacity he has empowered us to fulfill.

The opening presentation was wonderful. It was so diverse and colorful with people from different ethnic groups, from around the world. I have to say the tribal attire was beautiful and I didn't really know Presbyterians had such wide outreach. We had an opportunity to meet with others in small groups via zoom and share our joys and concerns in prayer. Worship was beautiful. We had a special performance by Camille Metoyer, it was kind of jazzy and I enjoyed it very much. The sermons were uplifting and filled with the spirit in English and Spanish at the same time simultaneously. The moderators were very joyful and it made this Zoom first time experience better!

The business side of the Assembly was also an adventure for me, as I listened to the different voices expressing their views, cons and pros, the reports and the decisions

that ultimately took place and really got a good practice for many hours sitting in front of the computer on how it was conducted.

Last but not least it was a joy watching Sandra Hedrick and Moon Lee as they made their case to be elected as Co-Moderators and was very thankful and proud to be part of St Augustine Presbytery and in the whole PCUSA. I really prayed for God to reveal the servants he had already chosen knowing that we were very well represented by Sandra.

Thank you once again for allowing me to really live and see what a Presbyterian is all about.

Alexandra (Sandra) Hedrick (Teaching Elder – Kirkwood Presbyterian Church / Stated Clerk)

One of the special things about serving as the stated clerk of a presbytery is the opportunity to attend the bi-annual General Assembly. In 2014, 2016, and 2018, I especially enjoyed the worship, fellowship, and serving as a parliamentarian. In Detroit, Portland and St. Louis, I made connections with presbytery leaders across the nation that have deepened with time.

This year the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) planned to convene the 224th General Assembly in Baltimore in July. I am grateful to the Presbytery of St. Augustine for electing me as a commissioner and endorsing me to stand as a candidate for co-moderator of the assembly, along with ruling elder Moon Lee of the Presbytery of Northwest Coast. Earlier this year, everything was put on hold to determine whether and how the church would hold an assembly. Then came the announcement that a shortened assembly would take place on Zoom. While the PC(USA) did an amazing job hosting a virtual assembly in a very short time, there was no comparison to being together in person in Baltimore.

Though Moon Lee and I were not elected as co-moderators, the experience of standing was quite an adventure! I enjoyed getting to know Moon, the other candidates, and the people behind the scenes who use their many gifts to make the General Assembly happen. I had the opportunity to focus more deeply on the state of the church and what it means to be a Presbyterian. I congratulate Elona Street-Stewart and Gregory Bentley who were elected as co-moderators, and I know that they will serve us faithfully and well. Elona Street-Stewart is serving as the first ever Native American co-moderator of the PC(USA).

What I enjoyed the most in the virtual assembly was the worship and the presentation of updates on the ministry and mission of the PC(USA) in so many different places in our nation and in the world. What I missed most in the virtual assembly was the fellowship of the commissioners and delegates from my own presbytery. I am sad that we did not get to sit at our presbytery's table on the floor of the assembly and experience everything together in person. There was no ongoing conversation about the richness of our experience. We could not worship side by side, and often I couldn't even find their faces among the hundreds of squares on Zoom. We were limited to texting one another when a particular issue was on the floor to suggest that someone speak. We never got to know the rest of the nearly 500 commissioners and the advisory delegates from other

presbyteries who served with us, except for the handful we were able to meet while attending a brief orientation and a Bible study.

The business of the 224th General Assembly was limited to “core and critical” items. Most of the overtures that had been submitted were not addressed at all. In the business that was done, J. Herbert Nelson was elected to a second term as stated clerk of our denomination. Action was addressed to support Native American concerns and to address suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The assembly passed a resolution – called “Responding to the Sin of Racism and a Call to Action” – by a vote of 407-72. We confirmed updates to our child, youth and vulnerable adult protection policy. A very small increase in per capita was approved.

Quite a few other “core and critical” items were addressed, but the pressing issues that were not addressed understandably caused tension, frustration and anger. In some cases, diverse voices were not heard and timely business that was not on the agenda could not be addressed due to our polity that requires a super-majority to “suspend the rules.” I believe that most participants came away with a sense that we did not do enough meaningful work for the glory of God, and many of the features and events that make the General Assembly such a rich and uplifting experience were sadly missing.

This year’s experience with the General Assembly has raised questions about what the 225th General Assembly will be like. As many have said, “it will not be the same.” It will not be the same as the last time we were together in person; nor will it be the same as the first time we were virtually together online. I hope and pray that we can find effective ways to combine the benefits of technology with the richness and wholeness of being together in person. Presbyteries throughout our denomination are already having related conversations about how the Holy Spirit is pushing us to reconsider the ways we meet, connect, and serve our Lord together in our regions and contexts.

**Joe Medearis (Teaching Elder – Arlington Presbyterian Church /
Peace Presbyterian Church)**

It was an honor to serve as a commissioner to the General Assembly. This GA is representative of the times in which it was held in many ways. I look forward to serving again in the future.

**Kevin Wright (Theological Student Advisory Delegate –
Woodlawn Presbyterian Church)**

Preliminarily, I continue to be extremely honored and humbled to have been encouraged to pursue Theological Student Advisory Delegate (TSAD) for this year’s General Assembly. For this, I owe a debt of gratitude to Rev. Sandra Hedrick. I also feel a deep sense of satisfaction to have participated in such an important and meaningful process for our denomination and the Church. With God’s help I was able to overcome my initial disappointment in the virtual nature of the 224th General Assembly. This disappointment was based on the good things I had heard regarding previous General Assemblies, held live and in person. Ultimately, my reliance on the

God-given wisdom of leadership to hold this assembly virtually allowed me to focus on the important business at hand, and also to enjoy the virtual proceedings to the extent possible.

Largely because of the virtual nature of this General Assembly, it is my feeling that the value, effectiveness, and beauty of the worship segments were accentuated. At least this was the case from my personal point of view. The worship in song was nothing less than uplifting and addicting. The speaking/preaching by Rev. J. Herbert Nelson, along with Bishop Powell and Rev. Adrian Nelson of the AME Zion Church, provided encouragement, hope, and direction for today and tomorrow. In my estimation, the worship segments made the entire process possible.

I appreciated, and found valuable, the Participant Training (Session 9) which, without question, adequately prepared me for my role as TSAD. I also appreciated the preliminary meetings held by our presbytery, which prevented us from going into any portion of the assembly cold. The Small Group I was assigned to, met on Friday, June 12th at 4 p.m. EDT. During this session we were encouraged to respond to what has sustained us during the pandemic, as well as what our prayer is for the upcoming General Assembly. The Small Group Bible Study (Discussion 1) met June 24th from 7 – 8:30 pm. Regarding the actual Plenary Sessions, I was amazed to see how closely the commissioner/delegate vote followed the student/youth votes. This allowed me to fully realize the relationship and the importance of all of our roles. Our ability to conduct all of this on the Zoom platform was nothing short of amazing. I remain open to, and hopeful for, another opportunity to participate in future General Assemblies.

I would also like to acknowledge Chris Lieberman, of our presbytery, for his support, including the delicious Crave Box which helped sustain me through the long hours of the sessions.

**Emma Cottrell (Young Adult Advisory Delegate –
Community Presbyterian Church)**

The 224th General Assembly was not what I or probably anyone initially expected. I was disappointed that it was online, but I do appreciate all the effort that went into it. I have sympathy for the committee that spent so much time preparing for thousands of Presbyterians to arrive in Baltimore. I have sympathy for the people who were excited to experience the General Assembly for the first time. I think a lot of us were disappointed, it wasn't what any of us could have imagined. However, I appreciated that the denomination saw what was necessary and pushed through. I appreciated that in addition to the essential business, we stopped and said what is urgent in our world right now! My favorite thing about Presbyterians is the emphasis we put on serving others, and I felt we did our best to continue that work despite the circumstances. I appreciate the opportunity to be a part of such a unique General Assembly.