

Appendix C

General Assembly Commissioner Reports

Connie Smith
Stephen Crowley
Rev. John Diller
Rev. Jennifer Hallberg



I continue to reflect on my time serving as a General Assembly Commissioner for our Presbytery. I will always be grateful for the opportunity to serve with and to learn from many devoted, thoughtful and committed leaders.

The opportunity to apply coincided with my retirement and the beginning of my exploration of new ways to be of service. GA 225 was structured in a hybrid format with Committee Meetings held in Louisville over a three-week period in June, followed by plenary sessions held via zoom July 5-9.

What follows are *some* reflections of my experience:

- **Our denomination has extraordinary resources:** talented teaching and ruling elders who shared their gifts in so many ways, including leading daily worship during Committee meetings and plenary sessions. I also learned about/ was reminded of the plethora of program resources developed by talented teams that are consistent with our reformed theology and available to us - resources on gun violence, child advocacy, racial justice, environmental stewardship, women's concerns, inter-religious relationships, etc. I know that my church family doesn't always take advantage of these resources, and I suspect we're not alone.
- **We are diverse across every dimension of difference**, including but not limited to age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, color of our skin, and primary language. Our churches are also diverse with more than 60% of current congregations being "small." This diversity was a joy to witness!
- **Technology is a new normal for all of our gatherings.** Our committee meetings in Louisville were in meeting rooms /production space built out for this assembly. While we were in person, we also connected via zoom allowing for overture advocates and information resource reps to join us in the moment. The zoom technology also allowed for instantaneous translation, as needed in Spanish, Korean and English. There were reports, presentations offered – for the first times in some cases - in languages other than English.
- **We addressed some difficult issues.** We were reminded *to allow the Holy Spirit to show up in astonishing ways* and to focus on loving all of the children of God potentially impacted by our decisions. At times, we disagreed without being disagreeable.
 - We approved 12 weeks of family leave, strengthened the church's response to sexual misconduct and affirmed our position on reproductive justice.
 - We approved the creation of a commission to unite the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency.
 - We declared the government of Israel's actions toward Palestinians as apartheid at the time we condemned anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.
 - Overtures on violence, divestment in fossil fuel companies, supporting immigrants and asylum seekers, and racism and reparative justice were also approved.
- **Presbyterian polity is tedious *and* foundational to who we are.** Decency and order prevailed especially as we considered multiple amendments to a motion only to circle back to the original motion. I have new respect for parliamentarians versed in the most current version of Roberts Rules of Order. I also have heightened appreciation for our constitutional structure, defined by our Book of Order, and connecting us across our denomination with other PCUSA churches, the Presbytery, our Synod, the Office of the General Assembly and Presbyterian Mission. We can all look forward to learning more about and acting on some of the actions taken at GA 225.

Report from the 225 General Assembly as attended in person and by ZOOM
Stephen J. Crowley

First, thanks so much for the opportunity to serve the churches of the Presbytery of St. Augustine as well as the greater church. It is a fulfilling and humbling experience to work for the church and see the Spirit move among its people even on Zoom. Can you imagine Jesus meeting with his disciples on Zoom?

Second, thanks to the staff of the Presbytery for their most kind hospitality during the online plenary portion of the Assembly. Thanks for the puffy Cheese Doodles, warm cookies and a most collegial atmosphere. It was awesome to share a room with our other commissioners. Even amongst our small group the discussion was lively, informative and spirit filled.

By now you have seen, at least in broad strokes, the actions the Assembly took. I'm not going to rehash them here. Somethings do stand out for me, so in no order:

- Never fear about the future of the PCUSA. The YAADs (Young Adult Advisory Delegates) were a cogent, articulate, and positive voice throughout the Assembly. At times they lead the discussion, forced us in unexpected directions, and brought about better results than earlier adult-crafted positions envisioned.
- The daily worship during the days of Plenary was particularly inspiring. It reinforced the connectional nature of Presbyterianism. For me, the invitation to say such common things as confessions or the Lord's Prayer, together but in the speaker's own language reminded me that the big tent of the PCUSA covers a most diverse body of God's people; all gathered in one place.
- Just being together and hearing wide ranging discussions and diverse opinions being expressed all to further the work of God among his people was most inspiring.
- I agree with most of the decisions the Assembly made with one major divergence. I strongly believe that if the future is hybrid GA's, the committees should meet in person and the plenaries should be online. The intimacy and bond that develops among committee members is essential to achieving the best possible product to present to the entire GA. In my humble opinion, it is important to be able to see body language, talk freely among one another and share meals in a way that is not possible online.

I am sure my fellow commissioners will provide other views, impressions, and experiences, and interpretations of the Assembly, so I will stop here with another great big thank you for offering me the opportunity to serve.

Stephen J. Crowley

GA Commissioner's Report
John M. Diller, Teaching Elder Commissioner
9 September 2022

Primarily I am filled with a spirit of gratitude, therefore please allow me to offer some words of thanks.

- To the session and congregation at Orange Park Presbyterian Church: thank you for allowing me the time necessary to prepare and participate effectively as a commissioner. The trust you have placed in me over these seven years to perform ministry in a multitude of ways is always received with humility. I continue to strive to be worthy of such grace.
- To the Presbytery of St. Augustine: thank you for the prayerful support and tender words of encouragement for me and for the other commissioners. I value the unity we claim and embrace, and I honor the truth that the great cloud of witnesses through which we pass and in which we labor is a tremendous source of strength gifted by Almighty God.
- To God, whose self-revelation is unmatched and always perfect for and in its time: All praise, honor and glory to you. Even today you teach and reprove me even when I am uninterested. Thank you for your faithfulness and your gentleness. I pray you continue to guide and mold me into an image and instrument of peace.

My big takeaway from serving as a commissioner to the 225th General Assembly is this: ours is a big church! Friends, do not be deceived by the news of shrinking numbers and leaner budgets. Because we serve the Lord, we can trust that the Lord's hands and abilities are not dependent on our human standards and anxieties. Lives are being changed at the mention of the Jesus's name. Rifts in families, communities, and nations are finding pathways to healing as faithful witnesses stand firm on the Solid Rock of our salvation. Governments and institutions are giving heed to the voices that speak out for those who do not know the language to tell of their own oppression, let alone have the understanding that the language comes from the Lord.

I served on the Race and Gender Justice Committee. Our work was brought to us via leftover or referred work from previous GA's and from new overtures. Every piece of business was meaningful and impactful for someone. I felt touched that the PC(USA) took on the role of Repairer of the Breach for the racist closure of Memorial Presbyterian Church of Juneau, AK way back in 1962. I am glad to know that the plight of racial-ethnic congregations who have such a difficult time bringing on full-time pastors are receiving insight and assistance from multiple agencies within the PC(USA). The Apostle Paul tells us that when there is pain in one part of the body, the entire body suffers. I believe, through the work of the committee and the action of the full body, we have moved in directions of healing.

As for the full GA plenary, I urge you not to fall into the trap of believing everything you may have heard or read by those who claimed to be observing. I followed them too, while attending and participating in the online plenary sessions. Texting with a friend, I was disturbed at the amount of willful mischaracterizations, misrepresentations, and plain ugliness that was happening supposedly in the name of Jesus. I am not saying there was never any cause for

complaint and dissent: there was a piece of international business for which I took umbrage and I am dubious on a few actions where I suspect power and money are unusually strong factors. I am however more confident in the Spirit's movement than I am in human schemes.

Oh, then there was the 20 minutes spent discussing whether we would hang on to the title "Honorably Retired."

I recommend service as a GA commissioner. It wasn't always fun, but it was fulfilling. My experience is different from others since I couldn't attend the committee meetings live in Louisville due to my catching COVID, but I could follow along. Even with that, I am so glad and thankful.

GA Commissioner's Report
Jennifer Hallberg, Teaching Elder Commissioner
Health, Safety, and Benefits Committee

General Assembly, how does one begin to summarize this session? I am blessed and grateful to be able to attend this year. This year was unique in many ways. Before I go much further, however, I am a self-proclaimed polity nerd. That relates because this year we had the huge task of trying to complete two years of overtures and amendments in two weeks. And..... We did it mostly graciously, decently, and in order.

My committee, the Health, Safety, and Benefits Committee, dealt with issues including abortion, family leave act, and sexual misconduct training. I had a unique experience of serving on a committee that directly dealt with an amendment that a few years ago I helped to craft. This intersection was not planned by anyone as the committee selection is completely random but shows to me the hand of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in this whole process. This committee also met during the same week that Roe vs. Wade fell. To be surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses and such a wonderful group of committee members on such a difficult day was a blessing and Godsend. We, as a committee, were debating the nuances of parental leave, what that means for people like me who are unable to biologically have children and what it means for our congregations during that day. It was a day full of emotions and prayer as we made it through the work ahead. Later that same day after we spent a time in prayer, we reaffirmed the Presbyterian pro-choice stance, passed a resolution to be an denomination that is supportive of others to this affect, and direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to create a reflection guide for congregations

on this issue. My committee passed other amendments and resolutions as well related to Sexual Misconduct and updating the documents on Mental Health including updating Comfort My People. At the end of the week, I began to realize that this week was one the best weeks of experiencing what it really means to be Presbyterian.

I made many new friends and built many connections throughout the church.

←



—→

I also had an opportunity to connect with old friends.



The plenary session of the General Assembly was virtual while sitting with my fellow commissioners from the presbytery. It was a difficult week involving prayer, yelling at a computer screen, texting new and old friends, and removing old terms from the Book of Order. During the time my committee's work was being discussed, there was a palpable tension in the room. However after much discussion and delays, all of our amendments

and resolutions passed, some more easily than others. The virtual aspect of this part of the General Assembly was difficult and (in my opinion) potentially limiting voices that needed to be heard. We discussed the format for next year and the limitations needed in light of COVID and making GA more accessible. The presbytery staff did an amazingly wonderful job of hosting us and provided space for prayer and snacks. General Assembly continued late into the night towards the end however we made it through 2 Assemblies worth of material and many difficult discussions and decisions. Some of the noteworthy amendments and resolutions that were passed include:

- Divestment from 5 major fossil fuel companies
- Amend the Book of Order to include policy for family leave, rules around sexual misconduct training for ministers, Christian Educators, inquirers and candidates
- Divest from 3 major companies that sell guns and make statements against gun violence
- Remove the title Honorably from the Retired Designation
- Acknowledge historical issues surrounding prejudice and land use

It was an amazing experience and I am blessed to have been there. I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it. I really enjoyed the polity and chance to see the work of God in action.