

“Messy Tables, Messy Mission was the title given to the Bible Study that started our day. It was led by Richard Boyce, a professor at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte, and was a consideration of 2 Samuel 9, where David invites Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son and Saul’s grandson, to eat at the king’s table. Was the king motivated solely by graciousness and his friendship with Mephibosheth’s father or was this more of a power play by David to keep a potential rival to the throne under his control? That suggested other questions like: who do we invite or fail to invite to our tables? What’s our motivation?

Tomorrow we’ll look at Acts 15:35-41 which will be led by Sung Hee Chang, another professor from Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte. You can find the Bible Study on PC-Biz under Committee 01 – Business Referrals or at <https://pcbiz.s3.amazonaws.com/Uploads/2cd6d12f-ca66-4d0d-b859-16eb4ab4175c/e.1.pdf>.

I then spent some time sitting in on Committee 05 – Mid Councils. They started out by approving the recommendation to merge the presbyteries of Central Washington and Northwest Coast and then hearing a report from the Task Force for Korean Speaking Congregations. That was certainly important for the churches and presbyteries involved but was not exactly compelling for the rest of us.

I left to attend the workshop sponsored by the Church Leadership Connection on “Supporting the Call Process”. It was a panel of presbytery and synod staff members responding to questions about: What leadership competencies are needed in today’s pastors? How is call and fit evaluated in the search process? What is in place to sustain healthy pastoral relationships? How do you deal with individuals with troubled pasts who are seeking pastoral calls? It was helpful to know that most people are facing the same issues and doing the same things that we do here.

I used the remaining time before lunch to sit in on Committee 4 – The Way Forward. There are 78 members on that committee, including our own Barbara Accord. While I was there, they seemed to be bogged down in parliamentary procedure. As a former stated clerk I found that somewhat interesting but not enough to make me stay.

For most of the rest of the day I watched Committee 9 – Immigration and Environmental Issues. (Yes, everyone agrees that it’s an odd combination but the work has to be divvied up somehow.) They spent from 1:30 PM to well past 9:00 PM dealing with 5 overtures on climate change and divestment from companies involved in the fossil fuel industry. Overture 09-01 from San Francisco Presbytery on Fossil Fuel Divestment had concurrences (votes supporting the overture, some with additional rationales) from 29 other presbyteries, which represent over 400,000 Presbyterians. Each presbytery that votes to send or concur with an overture has the opportunity to send an overture advocate to General Assembly who has the opportunity to speak directly to the committee considering their overture. The 30 overture advocates for 09-01 got together and decided to use the time given to them to have three people speak briefly to the committee.

Overture 09-02 from New Covenant Presbytery (Houston, Texas area) offered “An Alternative to Divestment from the Fossil Fuel Industry” which had the support of 8 other presbyteries. Overture 09-09 was a report from the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) Committee, which had been directed to study the issue of divestment from the fossil fuel industry by the 2014 General Assembly. Although each overture took a different approach to the issue, there was general agreement that the church needs to address global warming and climate change.

Committee 9 then spent the better part of the afternoon bogged down in parliamentary procedure as someone offered a motion that took elements of Overture 09-01 to call for the church to support divestment in companies involved in the fossil fuel industry. It seemed like there were 10 attempts to amend that motion. The committee was still stuck when they broke for dinner.

Since the committee resumed their meeting before I got back in the room, I’m not sure how they did it, but they were able to get back on track by deciding to have an up or down vote on Overture 09-01 which called for divestment from companies in the fossil fuel industry. In the end after a few

amendments, the committee voted to recommend to the General Assembly that the church adopt this overture by a vote of 31-25. It seems likely that there will be a minority report. Since it's such a close vote, it's hard to say what will happen on the floor of the assembly. I've often said, "What comes out of the committee is not necessarily what comes out of the assembly." You can find the original overtures as well as the results of the committee's work at <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/committee/569/business>.

There was a commissioner from New Covenant Presbytery (Houston, Texas area) who was complaining that it's going to be hard for him to face the people back home. He said if this passes, they'll see it as the church condemning their industry, condemning their careers, and condemning their lives. Another commissioner said that if this doesn't pass, the people in his town will write off the church as irrelevant and unable to take a stand.

The co-moderators of the General Assembly Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston visited Committee 9 while I was there. After admitting that they didn't envy the commissioners because they knew they had some difficult issues to deal with, they also advised them to "Make decisions out of faith and not out of fear." and "Don't worry so much about what the folks back home might say about your decisions. Worry about what God might say about your decisions." I thought that was good advice.

Tomorrow the committees continue to meet although they are supposed to wrap up their work by 5:00 PM with Tuesday night being a free evening. We've got our presbytery dinner scheduled for 6:30 PM. If the committees aren't finished with their work though, they'll have to keep meeting. Conceivably they could keep going through Wednesday morning, although that time is generally set apart for commissioners to read through the reports and recommendations from other committees before the plenary resumes in the afternoon. We'll see what happens. Please keep all the commissioners and all of us in Portland in your prayers.