

It was obvious that a number of commissioners had already left Portland when the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly convened for its final session at 9:00 AM this morning. Perhaps they were sleeping in after two late nights or they were busy packing for the trip home. At any rate there were a lot of empty seats. Our Young Adult Advisory Delegate Maddie DiGiulian had an early flight. To be honest she didn't miss much.

For the second morning in a row the General Assembly remembered us in prayer, this time lifting up the family of a Davis and Elkins student who had unexpectedly died after a heart attack, information that had been passed on by Tina Vial.

The Assembly voted to approve changes in the per capita budget which means that per capita will be \$7.50 in 2017 and \$7.73 in 2018.

The financial implications for the Mission Budget from the items passed by this year's GA mean that they will need to take into account an additional \$282,744 in 2017 and an additional \$162,500 in 2018. Interim Presbyterian Mission Agency director Tony DeLaRosa asked commissioners to text PMA to 41411. Doing so will take you to a link allowing you to contribute to the Mission Agency's budget. He said that if you think these additional programs that you approved are important then you should be willing to fund them. (He was only half kidding.)

He then lifted up their new website [www.presbyterianmission.org](http://www.presbyterianmission.org) which has a wealth of resources and gave an update on the 1001 New Worshiping Communities movement. There are now 344 of them. 64% of the participants are under the age of 40. 53% of them are racial ethnics. 57% meet in places other than traditional churches. 71% of the presbyteries now have one.

When asked, he said that the additions to the Presbyterian Mission Agency may involve cutting other programs or reducing staff. They still have to figure out exactly what they are going to do now.

In that light there was a motion to reconsider Item 12-06 which included around \$150,000 in new funding for the on-line journal "Unbound". The motion was defeated.

The Young Adult Advisory Delegates then presented gifts to the co-moderators and the outgoing stated clerk.

The Office of the General Assembly gave a gift to the Committee on Local Arrangements.

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Representatives of Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery showed a video and invited us all to come to St. Louis for the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly in 2018.

Gradye Parsons then introduced J. Hebert Nelson as the new stated clerk and to a round of applause and with a wave of his hand he walked off the platform, disappearing behind the curtain at the back of the stage. It seemed almost surreal but it certainly made a symbolic statement. Although Gradye doesn't officially retire until the end of July, J. Herbert Nelson is now the Stated Clerk.

The co-moderators then banged the gavel and announced that the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly would be adjourned following worship. Larissa Kwong Abiaza preached on Acts 1:2b-11. She asked some powerful questions: Was the gathered community in Acts even asking the right questions. Are we asking the right questions? Will we default to our old standards even though we're living in a new age? Are we looking up or are we looking out?

She then talked about her greatest failure as a the vice-moderator, which was signing on to the letter that was sent out following the shooting of a young black man in Ferguson, Missouri last summer. She was the only person of color whose name was on that letter. On behalf of the PC (U.S.A.) it encouraged everyone to remain calm. She said that maybe asking for calm when people are being shot by the police is not the right response. Her guilt and our discomfort were evident.

Then it was over. Commissioners began to collect their luggage to head for the airport or to begin some well-deserved time off. I get to fly from Portland to Phoenix to Charlotte to Charleston which will take me more than 12 hours if everything goes as planned. It will be a long night.

What will be the long term impact of this year's General Assembly? I might give a different answer in a few days or at least after I get a good night's rest, but at this point I'd say this: It gave final approval to the Belhar Confession which will be added to our constitution. Belhar can help shape the future of our denomination.

It also sent out a Revised Directory of Worship for approval and approved the appointment of a task force to revise the Rules of Discipline. The preparation for voting on the Revised Directory for worship gives us the opportunity to reflect on the theology of Reformed worship, which in itself is a good thing. Along with the adoption of the New Form of Government and the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity in 2011, these two actions mean that our Book of Order will have been completely overhauled within a decade.

This Assembly also elected a new Stated Clerk who will probably have a very different style than his immediate predecessors and may very well push us on social justice issues. We'll see.

I continue to be amazed at all the good work, the barely noticed good work that our denomination does. I leave each General Assembly promising myself that I will read the reports that were mentioned and look into the programs that I never knew existed. Most of the time works gets in the way and I never get around to it. I guess there's always hope.

Some may be upset by some of the actions approved by this Assembly. That almost always happens. It may be helpful to think that the General Assembly is "speaking to us" more than it is "speaking for us."

I encourage you to read the reports and resolutions that may seem troubling to see what they actually say, rather than relying on reporting by sources that may well reflect the views of the writer or their employers more than it does what they are attacking. It may even be more helpful to read the rationale of the original report or overture so that you can better understand the intentions and the context of what is being said.

After doing so, you may not agree. It may not change your mind. But at least you will know what a majority of the commissioners who gathered in Portland, Oregon from June 18-25, 2016 were thinking and what they wanted you to know.

If you have any questions about what happened in Portland, please contact our commissioners or our YAAD. They had front row seats, relatively speaking (I think they were actually in row N), but they put in the time to prepare, they were in the committee meetings, they were in the plenaries listening to every committee, and they were there for every minority report, substitute motion, and amendment. This was not a vacation. This was their opportunity to shape the future of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Because of them, and the people like them who willingly gave up 8 days of their time to serve the church, we will be a stronger and a better church.

Thanks again to our commissioners Barbara Accord, Chet Parsons, Tina Vial, and Todd Wright and to our Young Adult Advisory Delegate Maddie DiGiulian. They represented us well (and we can be proud that they were not annoying as were some commissioners who were constantly coming to the microphone to speak.) Special thanks to Tina Vial who willingly stepped in as the alternate when health concerns prevented Mike Lykens from getting to Portland.

As the co-moderators reminded us, there's only 103 weeks until we get to do this again in St. Louis.