

223rd General Assembly --- a Perspective

Offered by Charmaine Ponkratz

My pastor likes to say “the fun begins when you say ‘yes!’” The General Assembly ‘fun’ began with hundreds of pages of reading prior to the big event in anticipation of voting on 200 (plus or minus a few) resolutions. Imagine that for a moment: 718 commissioner and delegates discussing, discerning and deciding on 200 items over 8 days! That puts a whole new perspective on a session meeting.

The business of the week: While electronic voting machines allowed for confidential balloting (except for some voice votes deemed uncontroversial) let me share what guided my affirmative votes. I looked for resolutions that:

- ✚ Engaged action rather than endless study
- ✚ Modeled rather than mandated desired behaviors
- ✚ Built up rather than bashed down

Others will surely report on actions taken and I will be happy to enter into conversation about specific resolutions with anyone.

Since I served on the committee that deliberated over the recommendation for the per capita apportionment until just past 1:30 in the morning (yes, you read that time right!) I would be happy to share the details of how the Assembly ended up with the final decision.

General Assembly (GA) is all about the people: some who are GA groupies or regulars, others who were rookies like myself. Here’s a little window onto the Peace River Presbytery delegation:

Pastor Jeff DeYoe celebrated the 37th anniversary of his ordination while we were in St. Louis
Wayne Largent blogged his way through the 8 days and had opportunity to talk to the GA Stated Clerk
Mariah Martin (our Youth Advisory Delegate) was invited to serve communion
Pastor Bill Teng was elected to the A-Corp Board as they implement the Way Forward proposal for the GA

Pastor Randy Moody was pressed into service as floor parliamentarian
Graham Hart was attending his last GA in the official capacity as our General Presbyter, a time of reflection.

Besides our official delegation we were joined by Pastor Glen Bell (First Presbyterian Church Sarasota), Honorably Retired Pastor Shannon Jung (Peace Presbyterian Church, Lakewood Ranch), Pastor Penny Pitts (Bee Ridge Presbyterian Church, Sarasota), Pastor RC Smith (Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church, N. Fort Myers) and his wife Barbara, Pastor Wally Johnson (Northminster Presbyterian Church, Sarasota) and his wife Joyce.

As for me, I was grateful to see the familiar faces among the sea of brothers and sisters in Christ.

New ideas for the pioneers among us: Over 200 years ago Lewis and Clark launched their Discovery Expedition to explore the western portion of the United States from the St. Louis region. In the pioneering spirit I was looking for new discoveries that might add vitality to our congregations. Here are two gems:

Designate a *playground* in your sanctuary (think playground): Located in the front corner of the sanctuary with soft toys, a small table, coloring books and crayons for the restless so that they are not whisked away to a nursery, but remain as the youngest worshippers in the sanctuary. I saw it in action at Webster Groves Presbyterian Church.

Organize a *pastor swap* a few times a year: I learned about a majority white congregation that entered into a pastor exchange with a majority black congregation 4 to 5 times a year. Is there a Hispanic church in your neighborhood that might engage in such an exchange? What if you swapped choirs? What if it lead to a joint ministry for combined youth groups, Vacation Bible School, or feeding the hungry projects?

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve and see the national denomination in action and pray it will bring joyful and hopeful energy to our Presbytery and my church.