



Mariah Martin, YAAD

Peace River Presbytery

I just returned home after attending the 223rd General Assembly as a (YAAD) Young Adult Advisory Delegate in Saint Louis, Missouri. Let me begin by saying, how grateful I am to Peace River Presbytery and First Presbyterian Church, Sarasota for this experience. Being a YAAD has been one of the most humbling things I have experienced in my faith journey so far. Thank you to every single person who has helped me and prayed for me in the weeks and months leading up to my departure and during the week of GA. Really, none of it would be possible without the support from this presbytery, Graham Hart, General Presbyter, Randy Moody, Stated Clerk, and the other commissioners. While at GA, I found out how fortunate I am to be a part of such a large home church. I now know more clearly that many Presbyterian churches have less than a hundred members, and how uncommon it is for youth to be able to serve as an elder on the session.

I served on the Peacemaking, Immigration, and International Issues Committee and while it was very intriguing to learn the ins and outs of the business that was before this committee and all the Robert's Rule of Order and Parliamentary Procedures, my committee wasn't terribly exciting for me.

Then it all came together in plenary, where all the committees gave reports on their business and I learned more about issues from all the committees not just my committee. In the plenary sessions, we voted using our computers, and "advised" the commissioners on how to vote. While we spent sometimes hours on one item of business, we all felt so accomplished when it was done and "perfected." This process showed me how much each individual voice mattered and how collaboration, and often compromise was implemented to achieve meaningful resolutions.

My roommate and I became instant best friends and did everything together. She is the same age as I am and a deacon at here church in Phoenix, Arizona. I'm very happy we got to experience the week together. God surely put us in the same place for a reason, I know that we will be life time friends. We stayed up nights discussing our committee work and all kinds of church things.

We arrived in Saint Louis two days before the General Assemble convened for YAAD training. This was exhausting, but this part of the week really shaped the days that would follow. In training, they taught us everything we needed to know about the layout and structure of our committee meetings and the plenary meetings. This was exciting to learn about, especially for a "Presby-Nerd" like me! We learned about Parliamentary Procedure, and we learned about where our faith stood as young adults of the current church. We grew to know each other as a strong group of open minded, active members of the larger church. It was incredible to make friends from all over the country. (There was at least one YAAD from each state except Hawaii)

One of the many things from the week that stood out to me the most, and something that was very dear to my heart - was the Hands and Feet Initiative. The Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, Stated Clerk of the

General Assembly, introduced this new idea for the PC(USA), to highlight and strengthen local and national efforts by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to facilitate change and communicate God's love. The goal was to do more than just show up in the city of the General Assembly, spend a bunch of money, eat in the restaurants, and leave. But to take the sanctuary to the streets and show the city that we're there to make a difference. For this year's initiative we marched in the streets of downtown Saint Louis to protest the cash bail system. We raised 47,000 dollars to help bail people out of jail who are in for non-violent crimes. These people sit in jail for years awaiting trial because they can't afford \$200, \$100 or even \$50 bail. And because of that, they miss out on job opportunities and a chance to rehabilitate.

General Assembly provided me with so much hope for the future of the church. Which is honestly, exactly what I was hoping to get out of this experience. I was praying I would gain more faith for the church, to receive ways that I, as a youth, can help my church, and my presbytery grow and share the word of God. That is exactly what I got. Through my YAAD advisors, we were constantly reassured that the youth are not the "future" but we are the "present." The Presbyterian Church is the largest reformed denomination. This means that our church isn't dead, as some think. Some things need to die in order to make room for new things to grow. God's call extends everywhere, regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality, or religion. I have so much faith in our church, now more than ever. We're moving forward, and THAT is exciting.

Additional to all of the business at GA, I have grown so much spiritually. The worship services were so well sculpted, and so moving for me. I won't blabber about all the points I wrote down from the week... but let me just say, my journal is full, and so is my heart.

Finally, I was introduced to so many organizations in the exhibit hall. One booth that stuck out to me the most was the More Light Presbyterians booth. This is an organization that embraces all people, of all sexualities and genders. The people of More Light believe God is bigger than we could ever imagine. That we are created in the image of a God of abundance, of limitless possibilities and expansion. This organization is rooted in following the risen Christ and seeking to make the Church a true community of hospitality.

Again, I am more than thankful for this experience, I cannot wait to see what I do with all this new knowledge I've been given.

Love abundantly and celebrate diversity.

Mariah Martin, YAAD
Peace River Presbytery