



Good News for the Pews

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From Pastor Don

A lot has happened since the last issue of *Good News for the Pews*! There are a number of things I could choose to write about: e.g. where are we at in the Mission Study Process? (the final draft of the report is being considered by the Commission before the congregational review, and the Committee on Ministry approval); current plans for adapting and sustaining our hybrid worship; changes in mission and service at the Food Pantry; and preparation for the opening of the Central Subway (whenever that will be). But I think I will try to give a brief update of my time as a Commissioner for the 225th General Assembly.

My preparation for GA began back in May when I took a week of Study Leave to do my preparatory reading. I was assigned to the Committee for General Assembly Entity Policy and Procedures. It was not nearly as exciting as it sounds. GA-PAP (as it was abbreviated to), focused its work on “items related to administrative and internal issues of A Corp/Administrative Services Group, Presbyterian Mission Agency, and the Office of the General Assembly.” Some items included *Proposed Revisions to the General Assembly Organization for Mission, Institutional Relationship Agreement between Presbyterian Women in the PC(USA), Inc, and the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, and *Amendments to Session Annual Statistical Report Regarding Age Categories*. In a nut-shell, my committee was deep into the weeds on policy-wonk stuff. In preparation there were over 1000 pages of reading to do, including about 800 pages of minutes of the various agencies and committee reports going back as far as 2018. I am yawning at my desk just typing this.

GA started on Saturday, June 18 with a plenary gathering of a quorum of Commissioners in Louisville to ratify all the work done at the 2020 GA. We had to ratify that work because it all took place online but the standing rules of GA *did not allow online meetings*. So some commissioners were flown in to make a quorum, and then as a quorum they ratified all the decisions of the last Assembly. Rev. Will McGarvey from our presbytery was present in person. After ratifying the previous assembly, the next order of business was to change the standing rule to allow us to work online this year. All the rest of us then participated online for other preliminary business. Sunday, June 19 was a fantastic online worship service commemorating Juneteenth and energizing us for the weeks of work ahead.

You may recall Scott Barlow preached at PCC on June 19, while I was attending GA virtually. Then I was in the office for a week and I preached on the 26th. I then flew to Louisville for my in-person committee work. All the committees met in-person, though the schedules were
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staggered. Only about ¼ of all commissioners were in Louisville at any given time. There was not a lot of time to network or to meet other commissioners. Our work started each morning at 9:00. We had a half-hour for lunch, and continued to work each evening until about 6 pm. We were released to find our own dinners, and most commissioners simply returned to the hotel, the Galt House, just a couple blocks away from the GA offices. In the committee time we wore masks, and were required to be on Zoom *while in the room* to allow non-English speakers a chance to participate with simultaneous translations. It was challenging, and tiring, but a lot of good work was done. Regretfully, there were really no opportunities to get to know my fellow commissioners.

I flew home and had July 4th as a transition day before the start of the online Plenary sessions. Starting Tuesday, July 5th we convened at 8:00 am Pacific Time for Zoom worship before we transitioned into the Zoom plenary meetings. Online worship was brilliant! Much of the liturgy was written by Rev. Ruth T. West. Many members of our presbytery were featured, including Nancy Chee and Rev. Leslie Veen who were readers. Using both Zoom, and very well designed and very functional online applications, we conducted all the business of GA for the next five days. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday started at 8:00 am. Friday & Saturday began at 7 am (!). Each evening went at least until 9:00 pm. That's 13 hours of meetings, *on Zoom*, with either an hour or half hour for lunch, and an hour dinner break. It was, in a word, **brutal**.

This was my first GA, and I have never really followed the assemblies in the past, so I cannot compare our work or our deliberations with previous GA's. It seemed to me that the Assembly was exceptionally skewed toward what I call the progressive wing. Most decisions were made with large majorities, sometimes well above two-thirds. Although most of the actions spoke to my sense of where Jesus calls us to be, I was in the minority on a couple of votes. I did speak a couple of times during the plenaries, and my star turn may have been when I was recognized to speak against an attempt to change the rules to require a 2/3 majority of presbyteries to change the Book of Order, instead of the current, simple majority. Speaking obliquely (being aware I was in Mitch McConnell's home state) I suggested, rather convincingly, that we did not need to create a Presbyterian version of the filibuster which gives the minority power over the majority. My opinion carried the vote 375 to 20.

Scores of changes were made and scores of resolutions were passed. I cannot possibly go through them all. In fact I can't really even give good highlights other than a few things. The GA resolved to *Offer an Apology to Africans Americans for the Sin of Slavery and Its Legacy*; passed a *Resolution on Racism as a Public Health Crisis*; and passed a resolution co-authored by Lori Yamauchi and myself *On Violence and Hate Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders* (<https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3001103>). Furthermore, GA passed a resolution on *Investing in a Green Future*; on *Reducing the PC(USA) Carbon Imprint*; and resolutions to *Support an Energy Transition* nationwide away from fossil fuels. A resolution was passed to *Declare the PC(USA) a Sanctuary and Accompaniment Church* for undocumented immigrants. We also passed a *Resolution on Affirming Reproductive Justice* ...“affirming that women and pregnant people are full moral agents, created in the image of God. Recognizing that God alone is Lord of the conscience, we support their moral capacity to decide whether to continue or end any given
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pregnancy.” We *completely revised* the **Rules of Discipline** in the *Book of Order* addressing lingering loopholes for clergy and church staff around issues of sexual and other misconduct.

A summary can be found here: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2022/7/12/summary-general-assembly-actions/>. You can read all the actions we took by visiting PC-Biz, (<https://www.pc-biz.org/#/committee>), and using the drop down boxes to look at individual committee resolutions. You will find the full texts, the rationales, and the vote tallies as to whether they passed or not.

It was a real honor to serve as a Commissioner. I really want to thank the elders, deacons, and preachers who worked hard to cover in my absence. I want to thank you, the church, for your support as well. PCC has a long history of contributing and supporting leaders in our church, our presbytery, our synod and the General Assembly. I am both honored and humbled to have been able to be a part of your legacy. Thank you!



Donald Hammond, a Teaching Elder Commissioner from San Francisco Presbytery, spoke in the General Assembly Entity Policy and Procedures Committee on June 30, 2022 as part of the 225th General Assembly of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

(Photo by Rich Copley)