

**My experiences at General Assembly 221
by Jay Crane, Ruling Elder Commissioner,
First Presbyterian Church, Hickory
Report to Presbytery, July 29, 2014**

General Assembly 221 was a wonderful experience. I am proud to have been selected, proud to have been there, proud to be from the same Presbytery as the elected Moderator, and especially proud to have been a member of the assembly that confirmed with action what the church stands for. This was NOT a kick-the-can-down-the-road GA.

As part of the extensive training of commissioners, we were reminded of the Great Ends of the Church (Book of Order, F-1.0304), two of which spoke to me as I looked for guidance from the Holy Spirit. The first Great End, “*The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God*” seemed to apply to the gay marriage issue. I had been asked the following reasonable question by other church members, “Why couldn’t gays just utilize a civil marriage?” After much thought, the answer came to me and consisted of two responses to this individual. First, “Why did you want to get married in the church?” and, secondly, “Did you realize that if you refuse marriage to these persons, you are in effect saying that you don’t want them in your church?” Consequently, I voted “Yes” for the Authoritative Interpretation, which was approved by 61% of the commissioners. Concerning the change to the Book of Order on this topic, I have been deliberating this issue for months, trying to answer a question posed during our training, “Do the rights of individuals outweigh church unity?” I hoped that we could have both by the approval of the AI now and the postponement of the change to the Book of Order which requires a referendum to the Presbyteries. I voted “No” on this overture because of my fear of extensive further division of the denomination stirred by the referendum. However, it was approved by a 71% to 29% margin by the assembly, perhaps reflecting the departure of the more conservative members from PC(USA) and the changing societal atmosphere.

The other Great End of the church that called to me was “*The promotion of social righteousness.*” I did not view the recommendation to divest our funds from three companies (Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard, and Motorola), which foster the ongoing conflict in the West Bank between Israel and Palestine, as taking sides with either country. In my opinion, and I was one of the few with the opportunity to express one’s thoughts on this topic on the floor of the plenary session, the issue is simply our church living up to our established ethical standards for investing, consistent with our past divestitures from alcohol, tobacco, firearm and gambling companies. Several important elements of the overture in addition to the divestment include affirming Israel’s existence as a sovereign Jewish nation, support for a two-state resolution of the Israel/Palestine issue, and NOT supporting sanctions against Israel or boycott of Israeli products. The vote on this issue was 310 – 303; a switch in votes by only 4 people would have defeated the overture.

I was impressed by how the final wording in both the above overtures and subsequent communications by the Stated Clerk and Moderator was crafted to reflect the true intent and atmosphere surrounding the issues, eliminate misunderstanding, and encourage continuing dialogue.

I was on the Peacemaking and International Relations Committee, which debated many social issues, but not the Israel/Palestine divestment issue. When I initially received my committee assignment, I asked myself why the church is concerned with most of the topics on our agenda. I discovered, as directed by the second Great End, that it is the duty of PC(USA) to advocate through its agencies in Louisville the church’s stance on many social issues to various governmental bodies, political persons

and parties, and other church and non-profit entities. In committee, I supported several such overtures, including ones that addressed the plight of Christians suffering due to sectarian violence in Egypt and other parts of the world, relaxing travel restrictions for Cuba and removing Cuba from the US government terrorist list, establishing regulations and due process in the use of drones, appealing for peace in Iran, Syria, Iraq and the Congo, reviewing the current policy on human trafficking, supporting self-determination for Western Sahara, and urging military chaplains and leaders to support actions to prevent sexual exploitation in the military forces.

I was particularly impressed by the Young Adult Advisory Delegates (YAADs), generally ages 17 to the early 20s. Each Presbytery can send one YAAD, who is given voice and vote in committees, but only voice and an advisory vote in plenary. They did their homework, were aggressive to express their positions, and made significant contributions to the final wording of many overtures. After commissioners received these advisory votes in plenary, 98% of the their votes agreed with those of the YAADs. Our church is in good hands, now and in the future.

I was particularly thankful for the daily worship, which included great music, thoughtful sermons and meaningful scripture. These services, together with many other prayerful moments which occurred during debates in committees and in plenary presented many opportunities for the Holy Spirit to deliver His message to us!

Yes, I am proud to be a member of Presbyterian Church (USA).

Report on the 2014 General Assembly of the Presbytery USA Helen Hall, Ed. D., Ruling Elder

Serving as an elected PCUSA Commissioner from the Presbytery of Western North Carolina to the 2014 General Assembly in Detroit, Michigan, was an exhilarating, challenging, reflective, and awe inspiring experience for me. The Assembly's theme, "Abound in Hope" resonated throughout the worship services, the conversations, the debates, and extensive deliberations. Also, unity, justice, and reconciliation were identified as aspects of all that we were to accomplish.

The people of Detroit readily and graciously assisted us in numerous ways from our arrival to our departure from their city. Many churches opened their doors to us on Sunday morning. Terry Hanna and I attended and were received with open arms at Calvin East Presbyterian Church, a culturally diverse church hoping to grow. After the service we were provided a meal and fellowship with the members and other visitors.

At the time for choosing the Moderator for the 2014 General Assembly, the election of our own, Heath Rada, filled the Assembly Hall with joy and excitement and pride for many of us. From that moment on, we were fully engaged for the entire week of very long, highly engaging days. I was impressed with many facets of the general Assembly to include

- the overall rapport, the level of respect, the structure of our functioning in both the plenary meetings and the committees;
- the enthusiastic participation of the Youth Advisory Delegates;
- the inclusiveness of people and their voices from within the country and around the world; and
- the dynamic speakers and worship services.

There were 14 committees addressing diverse overtures, and I was selected to serve on the Civil Unions and Marriage Committee. There were 71 members of this committee, and we received interpretations and guidance from our Chairperson, Jeffery Bridgeman, and Vice-Chairperson, Rebecca Tollefson, regarding the work to be done in committee. We heard from numerous overture advocates and from committee reports; respectively, all committee members expressed our positions regarding the changes considered for the definition of marriage and the Authoritative Interpretation (AI) being considered. We engaged in difficult debate ... from strong adherence to "one man and one woman" to "marital equality for same-sex couples". Numerous testimonies were shared throughout committee meetings, especially from members among the 19 states and the District of Columbia where same-sex marriage is legal. It was shared clearly that whatever the decision made in committee, there would be individuals feeling joy among others feeling pain. Considering that reality, we agreed not to applaud or respond as winners on either side of each decision out of respect for the entire body. The results from the Civil Unions and marriage Committee are these:

- 1) Remove the ban on Presbyterian pastors marrying same gender couples in jurisdictions where same sex marriages are legal (recommending an Authoritative Interpretation). (Much debate was voiced over the legality of an Authoritative Interpretation.)
- 2) Redefine marriage from between "a man and a woman" to "between two people". This action, if approved by the Presbyterian Church USA, would require amendment to the PCUSA Book of Order (W – 4.9001).

These major committee decisions were upheld on the plenary floor with the addition of an amendment to the definition of marriage to include "traditionally between a man and a woman".

It was surprising how many committee decisions were challenged in plenary, not just from the Civil Unions and Marriage Committee, but also from Middle East issues, Immigration and Environmental

Issues and others. Our theme, “Abound in Hope”, and songs and prayers were very important as we engaged critically, spiritually, and wholeheartedly in the business of the Presbytery USA.

In closing, thank you for electing me to serve you as a 2014 General Assembly Commissioner. I also thank our General Presbyter, Reverend Bobbi White, for the training sessions provided for our commissioners in order to arrive at GA informed and ready for the work we faced. This experience has truly broadened and strengthened my knowledge, insights, and spiritual walk in service to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Commissioner's Report to WNC Presbytery
2014 (221st) General Assembly
Terry L. Hanna**

I want to thank the WNC Presbytery for giving me the opportunity to be a commissioner at the 221st General Assembly. I want to also thank those who traveled with me on this journey.

As I was leaving my hotel, the Marriott Renaissance, to go to the COBO center, I got lost, once again, in the maze of circles, escalators and elevators just trying to get out of the building. And I said to myself, "This is a good metaphor for my experience at GA."

Many overtures to GA were complicated, detailed and political. No matter how much we read or studied the issues before us, we could never be prepared for the decisions we were being asked to make. I know that some of us left the assembly deeply affirmed, some felt wounded, and some of us, like trying to get out of the maze of the hotel, just felt confused.

I was on the Middle East Issues committee. After two days of work from 8:30 in the morning until 10:00 at night, after we listened to voices from different sides of the issue, worshiped together, broke up into small groups for discussion and prayer, and wrestled with the overtures to find a solution, we were still divided (45-20) on our final draft of the 04-04 motion.

The motion affirmed Israel's right to exist and a two state solution. It encouraged continued partnerships and dialogue with our Jewish brothers and sisters. But It also affirmed investment in Palestine and divestment from American companies whose products are used illegally to tear down Palestinian homes and century old olive trees needed for their people's livelihood. The decision to divest was one of stewardship. It was a decision not to invest in companies that have products being used in ways that we would consider unethical. It was a decision made after many years of conversation with the companies involved without much success. It was a decision made that our missionaries in that region supported, not because it will make any difference in the companies practices, but because it will make a statement in support of a people living in that area. The vote on the floor passed by 51%-49%. It passed by just a few votes. It should be noted that the committee also made motions to discontinue the distribution of the material "Zionists Unsettled," and to disconnect this decision with the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement.

Other Observations of GA: We were all very proud to have our own Heath Rada voted as Moderator. I truly believe that he and Larissa Kwong Abazia have been called for "such a time as this." Heath is a person of strong faith who has the gifts to heal and connect people. Larissa is a small church pastor who has the gifts to imagine 1001 new faith communities while we revitalize churches already in our midst. We need to commit to pray for them daily as they go about their work.

It is obvious from this GA that our denomination is becoming younger. The YADS (Youth Advisory Delegates) had a very strong voice in this assembly. It is also obvious that we are becoming more diverse, more global, and more willing to act rather than refer the issues before us. However, my concern is that we spent far too much time focused on responding to the political climate in our world, rather than being focused on getting the gospel message out into our world through our churches. As I go back to my church in Bryson City, I am challenged to remember Jesus' words in the Gospel of John, chapter 15. Jesus said, "Abide in me...because you can do nothing without me...Abide in my love...and...This is what I command you: love one another."

With this reminder and with a renewed commitment to invest in prayer, discipleship and to live in a spirit of hospitality and love, I go home in *HOPE*.

Terry Hanna



Moderator's column: The beginning of a dialogue

July 7, 2014 by [Heath Rada](#)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) of our church adjourned on June 21 after eight days of deliberations, worship, and voting. Many decisions were made, which usually means answers to questions were settled. However, in our Reforming church, we find that the decisions only helped to highlight some of the issues that face our denomination today. Certainly we received directions on what we should do in regard to many matters, but many questions were raised instead of solved.

I have my own questions, and a number of you have expressed your own. As I enter my two years of service as Moderator, I wish to share with you some of the questions I have been asked in the past weeks, and which I hope to explore more fully during my tenure. These are not offered with a bias nor an agenda, but instead as the beginning of a dialogue that I hope we will share in the coming months.

1. Do we intentionally and openly accept that we are all in this church together because we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and that nothing else that we do is as important as that fact?
2. Do we recognize the reality that each of us is limited by our own humanity and sinfulness as we interpret the Scriptures, and may not agree upon various interpretations?
3. Is divestment of any sort the appropriate answer for our denomination to take when it tends to polarize and politicize our decisions, and has become the dominant issue facing each recent assembly?
4. How does our denomination reach out to both Palestinians and Jews in a way that communicates our sincere heartbreak for both communities concerning their victimization of terror and harassment, and their right to a homeland?
5. Do our decisions about marriage sincerely reflect a decision to be open to people adopting and believing different positions concerning same-gender unions? Is there really room in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for those who believe this is a God-given right to worship and serve in congregations where people believe it is sinful behavior?
6. Is "Louisville" in touch with the needs of the church? In other words, are we as a denomination directing our central offices to serve our church in the ways that are most needed, as opposed to having the staff direct the priorities they believe to be important?
7. Is the General Assembly meeting organized in the best way to reflect the priorities of the church? Is there so much focus on voting that we miss other areas where we should be spending our time? Should we hear the stories of our successes in our congregations and also share the burdens of day-to-day ministry in churches, and explore together ways that these may be expanded or duplicated?
8. Do we maximize the presence and extraordinary gifts of the young adult advisory delegates, as well as other young adults throughout the church?

9. Are the 1001 New Worshipping Communities signs of a renewal in the PC(USA) or are these fads and non-centered gatherings of people in places that will not sustain longevity?
10. Are we giving adequate attention to small, older churches that are still vital, but having financial problems as opposed to the new entities?

I invite you to communicate with me as we seek to make our denomination one of healthy, caring Christians rather than a group of people who have lost their ability to identify the Godliness in each of God's children, who were created in God's image.

221st General Assembly YAAD Report
David B. Smith
Young Adult Advisory Delegate, WNC Presbytery
July 29, 2014

The YAAD experience is much different than that of other commissioners and advisory delegates. Our orientation began before most commissioners arrived and we probably had the busiest schedules of all. Through the struggle and the exhaustion we were continually reminded of God's nearness to us. During one of our nightly YAAD gatherings we read Philippians 4:4-9 together and I gave a brief reflection on the text. It was Phil. 4:4b that served as the source of our spiritual refrain throughout the rest of our time in Detroit. Many of us celebrated the new things that God was doing in our midst, but some of us struggled greatly with the decisions our assembly felt called to make. We knew that we would not always agree, but we were able to affirm that God draws near to us when we gather at the table together.

The 221st General Assembly addressed many issues of immense importance. I was assigned to *Committee 15: Immigration and Environmental Issues*. In accordance with several other overtures from the various committees that met during the assembly, our committee affirmed the PCUSA's commitment to raising awareness about immigration issues. I proudly supported the new policy that was created to connect a community of Presbyterians engaged in direct action for just immigration reform. I was also in favor of our committed to the task of deepening awareness of the injustice of current immigration policy. We also took steps to empower Presbyterians to work to change policies and practices that infringe on the human and civil rights of immigrants in our communities including immigrant detention, streamlined deportation, and the executing of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Committee 15 supported an overture that called the assembly to support a programmatic review of the impact of expanded coal export projects on human health and well being in specific areas. We stated our commitment to the "precautionary principal" as it applies specifically to issues of environmental justice. Steps were also taken to support research that fosters sustainable development and environmental stewardship.

The issue that produced the greatest amount of debate in our committee was undoubtedly the proposed categorical divestment from all fossil fuel (energy) companies. Though most committee members recognized the importance of responsible environmental stewardship, the committee and the assembly eventually decided to refer this proposal to Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI). Though I supported the decision to refer this overture to MRTI, I voted against it in committee and I signed the minority report that was presented in plenary. Our church needs to take drastic steps toward supporting sustainable development. Nevertheless, it is irresponsible for any organization to take an action of this magnitude without exploring all of its options first. In the past, MRTI has had success in encouraging companies to change policies that are inconsistent with the ethical standards of our church. It seems unlikely that energy companies will be overly responsive to our calls for reform. Nevertheless, the possibility should be explored before we decide to leave the table for good. Based upon conversations with members of the Board of Pensions (BOP) and MRTI officials, I signed the minority report that was presented in plenary because it included MRTI in the discussions and it was more in line with the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP).

During plenary, the 221st General Assembly stepped out in Faith. We celebrated the Lord's Supper with Christians from many different places and from diverse expressions of our religious tradition. We took steps toward the affirmation of new perspectives, valuable theological insights and prophetic cultural

witness by once again recommending the inclusion of the Belhar Confession in our Book of Confessions. We listened to our Jewish and Palestinian sisters and brothers with humility and we opened ourselves to the witness of the Sikh and Muslim communities.

The most intense plenary debate surrounded the proposed divestment from three companies (Caterpillar, Hewett Packard, and Motorola Solutions) based upon their lack of compliance with our denomination's ethical standards. The decision was to divest from three companies that violate PCUSA ethical standards by allowing their products to be used for non-peaceful activities. The General Assembly did not divest from Israel or from the Jewish people. To further express our commitment to both Palestinians and Israelis the assembly officially distanced itself from the inflammatory publication known as *Zionism Unsettled* and from the *Boycott, Divest, and Sanction* (BDS) movement.

Commissioners and advisory delegates answered God's call to welcome all people into the full life of God's church. I am proud to say that I voted for the Authoritative Interpretation (AI) that gave pastors the right to perform same-gender marriages. I also supported the adoption of a proposed amendment to our constitution that will change the "definition of marriage" in our *Book of Order* if the presbyteries pass it. Additionally, along with the assembly and in accordance with the love shown for all in Jesus Christ, I fully support the steps taken by those gathered to ensure the continued welcome and affirmation of believers who do not agree with this decision. I have many sisters and brothers who would consider themselves "conservative" on this issue and my heart breaks for them. Having once embraced many of their values, I understand what they are experiencing and I long for the day when they too will realize that there is room for everyone at God's table. May all of us, regardless of our position in these issues, seek to exemplify the sacrificial love and compassion shared with all of God's children in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The theme of the 221st General Assembly (Abounding in Hope) was drawn from a reading of Romans 15:13. As we gathered in Detroit many noted the similarities between the struggles the city is facing and the difficult times that our denomination has been experiencing. I agree that there are similarities, and I believe that they go deeper than many of us realize. Detroit is struggling. Maybe it is even dying. Yet, out from amongst the empty streets and sidewalks, the burned out buildings, and tattered symbols of what used to be, new life is springing up. The same is true of our church. The PCUSA is struggling. Maybe we are even dying. Yet, out from rickety pews, old buildings and tattered old soup kitchen doors, the hope of resurrection abounds. We must trust that in life and in death we belong to God. We must trust that God is near to us when we meet one another at the font, around the table and before the word. We must learn to honor the old things and to celebrate the new. We must praise God for the new life God is bringing to old churches and for the 246 new worshipping communities that are springing up across our denomination.

The commissioners and advisory delegates of the 221st General Assembly took on difficult issues with love and humility. We gathered around an open table and a filled font. Despite the notable tension in the room, people on all sides of every issue engaged in graceful debate. Our meetings were often tedious, but they were always fulfilling. Our process was often frustrating, but we know that it gave us the ability to celebrate God's presence in our midst. There were tears of joy and tears of sorrow but we stayed at the table. We did what needed to be done and we did it in a spirit of love and compassion. I am truly grateful to have been given the opportunity to serve as the Young Adult Advisory Delegate for our presbytery. May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

REPORT TO PRESBYTERY on the 221st General Assembly

The Rev. Mr. Samuel P. Warner

Tuesday, July 29, 2014



Perhaps the best report I can share with Presbytery regarding my experience as a commissioner to General Assembly is excerpts from newsletter articles and sermons shared with the Belmont Church during the Assembly and since my return.

From my article in our weekly church newsletter on Wednesday, June 18 during the Assembly

The Assembly elected a Moderator on Saturday – Dr. Heath Rada, an elder in our presbytery who is a member of Asheville’s Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church. I am convinced one of the reasons Heath won on the first ballot so convincingly was his unqualified faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as well as his passionate resistance to identify any person in the Church who shares this singular profession with a “label” or as more or less “favored” by God than anyone else....

Interestingly (or providentially!), Heath has been assigned the seat next to mine in the large assembly hall and yet it has remained empty given his election and duties as Moderator. Vice-Moderator Larissa Abazia and I have been assigned to the same GA committee (*Church Polity and Ordered Ministry*), yet somewhat coincidentally she too has been assigned the seat next to mine in our committee room which has remained empty because of her new responsibilities. I am the one commissioner in the entire Assembly who has no one seated to my immediate right because each one has been given a role of leadership as either Moderator or Vice-Moderator.

From my sermon “On Our Own?” for June 29 based on I Corinthians 1:10-17

In spite of all my anxiety over representing this church and our presbytery at the General Assembly a few weeks ago, one thing I knew beyond a shadow of doubt: I was never “*On My Own!*” I knew many of you were praying for me and thinking about me....

That being said, my purpose this morning is to place all of this in the context of a single overriding theme I believe God’s Word calls us to consider in every aspect of our life together in *The Church*. And that theme is one of *unity and peace*....

How can we affirm resolutely what we believe, yet also acknowledge and confess that our understandings (however right they may be!) are never identical with the pure and perfect *Truth?*

My frustration grew with each passing day as the General Assembly moved through the week speaking and voting on everything from *Tax Justice* to *Marriage* to *Fossil Fuel Divestment* to *International Relations* to topics where no one, in my view, was an expert on much of anything – STILL, the words I kept writing in the margins of my legal pad full of notes were “Humility, Sam; humility!” And I remembered *how* whenever I have thought myself to be *so* right, it has always been checked by *The Truth* that no one (save Jesus Christ!) is ever *that* right....

You know, as frustrated as I felt at times while attending the General Assembly, and as we talked about issue after issue in which there was a guarantee that no matter what we did we would surely make someone angry, one reality kept me there in spite of the fact it seemed I was in the minority just about *all* the time. And that one reality was: I could never completely deny Christ’s presence with us there, just as I cannot deny Christ is present with us here right now. You see, because of Christ and “*the body of Christ*” through His Church, we are never, never, never all ... “On Our Own!”

From my article in our weekly church newsletter on Wednesday, July 2

The Israel/Palestine conflict defies a solution that will bring both parties together given the generational nature of the hostility and the fact enmity between both parties is practically “genetic” and “hereditary” where “*the iniquities of the fathers [are visited] upon the children to the third and fourth generation*” (Deut 5:9b). Consequently, when the General Assembly sought to inject itself into the discussion by consideration of “divestment,” it was my opinion the *risks* associated with making such a political statement (regardless of one’s perspective) far outweighed any potential *gain* or *influence* on decision-making in the region. Much to my surprise, therefore, I found myself standing two people back in line to speak at a microphone during the debate

when “the question was called,” discussion ceased, and the vote was taken (310-303) to approve “divestment.” The following are the remarks I had hoped to share.

“Mr. Moderator, I rise to speak for the Minority Report as amended [against divestment] to replace the Main Motion 04-04 as amended. I do so for three reasons. First, whether this is dealing with international relations or interfaith dialogue or purely unethical investment policy, the fact remains – ‘Perception is so often Reality’ regardless of the facts or the truth. Second, if there is a sermon I will surely preach before my congregation when I return from this Assembly, it must be titled – ‘Never Leave the Table!’ – [based on the speech of The Rev. James Foster Reese to the Assembly on Sunday who used this phrase in speaking of how he ‘never left the table’ during the Freedom Movement of the 1960s when he and his African-American brothers and sisters were losing at every turn in the Church and in the culture, but they never quit]. And third, in response to comments today by others of good will on equally divisive issues before this Assembly, such as ‘The issue is decided,’ ‘The time is now,’ ‘The time for talking is over’ – I respectfully and sincerely disagree! It is always time to talk and we should never leave the table, because God never stops talking with us, God never leaves the table, and God certainly never divests or quits on any of us! Therefore, I support the Minority Report [against divestment] as amended.”

The flurry of news reports about the actions of the Assembly as “against” Israel illustrate the point I was trying to make, and especially given the distrust being felt by our Jewish friends and neighbors fueled all the more by the tragic discovery that three recently kidnapped Israeli teenagers have been found and have been brutally murdered. To say I am disappointed by the action of our General Assembly on this issue, and several others, is an understatement. And yet, I will continue to voice my concerns in ways that are appropriate and, I hope, helpful, and will seek to do so in a way that strives to “build up the church” and never “tears it down.”

From my sermon “Not for Their Sake, but for Ours” on July 6 based on Matthew 11:25-30

I have found myself reflecting further on the General Assembly of our denomination meeting in Detroit where almost 200 of those in attendance were *Young Adult Advisory Delegates*. All were under the age of 25, but every one of them exuded tremendous energy and dedication with respect to the work of the Assembly as a whole as well as their active participation in every committee. In fact, each one’s preparation and participation often far exceeded that of actual commissioners like me! And while I suppose you could say every time a *Young Adult Delegate* spoke some of us probably thought to ourselves, “Not now, young man” or “Not now, young lady” – there was always a genuine eagerness and desire to hear what they had to say....

The words that have struck a chord in my spirit from my own experience these last several weeks are Jesus’ prayer of thanksgiving in Matthew 11: *“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;... yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.”* So why when it comes to the secrets of life and faith does God bestow them on the “children and youth,” those who are the youngest in faith and experience, insight and wisdom? I think the reason is to bring us to the awareness that it is so easy for us as teachers and pastors and parents and grandparents to think that there is no way a child or youth might actually know something we don’t already know!

“Listen to children!” “Listen to youth!” Because lately I’m coming to believe they know something I don’t know, something I need to know, something that lies at the center of the universe, and something that lies at the heart of God and of faith. They are the *new* in faith, the *young* in faith, and those for whom the passion and the power and the message of faith demands a response that cannot be ignored or forgotten or reduced to the predictable and the controllable and the way “it’s always been done” before.

From my communion sermon “Never Leave the Table” on July 13 based on Romans 15:7-13

The Rev. James Foster Reese is 90 years old and a retired pastor. Fifty years ago he was present with Martin Luther King in Washington for his “*I Have A Dream*” speech. And he clearly was the author of the one “take-away” phrase from the Assembly that spoke to me on every level. During the Freedom Movement of the 1960s, Rev. Reese recalled: “I may have at times felt ignored, unheard and marginalized, but I never left the table”

How often it seems that we as a Reformed and Protestant Christian body are doing more to follow our culture and where it leads us than we are leading our culture. The Detroit Assembly was “decent and in order” and painstakingly planned to the nth degree. Yet underneath the energy of the youth and the votes taken (on just about everything!) and the press we have received ever since, my impression is that we are still participating in a form of mainline Christian Faith that will continue to decline over the coming years until we focus our time and

energy and effort on saying a bit *less* about the same topics dividing our nation (almost irreconcilably) and *more* about the message *The Church* can say that no one else can or will say – the definitive love of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ....

That's why we're here. That why, I pray, we'll always be here. And that's why (with The Rev. James Foster Reese) I hope none of us ever "leaves the table."

A FINAL COMMENT

The above remarks share the spirit in which I served as a commissioner representing our presbytery. They do not reflect, however, what I will cherish most about my 8 days in Detroit – the love and grace and friendship I experienced as one among 5 other outstanding commissioners (Jay Crane, Helen Hall, Terry Hanna, Heath Rada, Bobbi White), a *Young Adult Advisory Delegate* (David Smith), and presbytery staff members in attendance (Anita Bernhardt, Bert Sigmon). I deeply appreciate your confidence, your trust, and for giving me the opportunity to serve.

Reflections on the 2014 General Assembly **Bobbi White, Commissioner Representative**

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in the believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

It was an exciting time for the Presbytery of Western North Carolina as Heath Rada, one of our very own, was elected moderator. Even more exciting was the recognition of the skills, experience and faith that Heath brings to the job. He cares about all people. He knows how to listen. He is a mediator and a reconciler, and he was elected not only on the first vote, and he also gained appreciation and votes of the Young Adult Delegates. I feel that God has called Heath and vice-moderator, Larissa Kwong Abazia, an outstanding young Chinese-American pastor from Queens, NY. We nominated him, so it is our responsibility to pray for Heath and Larissa through the next two years.

The things that I think about General Assembly are not the things that often get reported. There was a strong emphasis on worship and prayer. We worshiped every day and prayed often. We prayed during our committee meetings and during the plenary. At plenary, we also broke into groups and prayed. Besides the normal times of prayer, people could go up to the microphone and say, "I believe we need to pray." Sometimes these people said the prayer and at other times the moderator or another person prayed.

Discussion time was set aside for the two key issues of marriage and divestment. It was tremendously helpful and productive. We need to do similar things in our presbytery. One and a half hours were set aside to discuss each of these issues in small groups of about seven people. This helped people to look at all sides of the issues and express in a small group their positions, concerns, and questions. In almost all of the groups, there were people on both sides and even in the middle of these issues.

What most everyone realized was that someone in their small discussion group would be celebrating and feeling God's will was done, and another would be discouraged, hurt and feeling the body was not listening to God. In voting, we knew that persons who were very respected and cared for, would be grieving. There was no cheering or clapping when the vote was announced, because people understood that no matter the outcome, there would be pain. There were attempts to reach out both before the vote and afterwards, and a sense that we wanted to stay together. There was hope that we might focus on our following the Lord Jesus Christ and remain in service to Christ together. One of our distinguished speakers, Rev. James Reese, a giant in the Civil Rights Movement, said, "I always stayed at the table." I hope we can stay at the Lord's Table together.

There was much misunderstanding of what was done in the divestment vote. We recommended to the Board of Pension and the Presbyterian Foundation that they divest in only three companies. We invest in many companies doing business in Israel. It was not a divestment of Israel. We take a strong stand on Israel's right to exist and condemn terrorism. We support a two-state solution. We encouraged dialogues with Jews and Muslims. These companies joined a list of forty-two others from which we have divested, including companies connected with tobacco, products for war, and human rights concerns.

The vote on marriage was a particular concern to people in the 19 states where marriage is legal and those expecting this change in their state. An important part of the vote was the grantee that all pastors and churches have the ability to say "yes" or "no." There were some pastors and churches that were in favor of gay marriage and wanted the option to respond to people in their congregations, but did not want to change the definition. That is why the Authoritative Interpretation had appeal. However, the Assembly also approved sending to presbyteries an overture that changed the definition of marriage to "two people, traditionally between a man and a woman." There was an awareness that the vote resulted in tremendous pain for some and rejoicing for others.

After the vote on marriage, I was blessed to go to the dinner for Mid-Council leaders (General Presbyters/Executives, etc. with a few Synod and denominational people). The weight of the decision was felt by that group, as they would return to people and congregations celebrating and upset. At table groups we took times so that each person could share their feelings and concerns for their presbytery or organization. After a time of sharing, there was a significant amount of prayer around the tables.

I served on the Mid-Council Committee which dealt with Synod organization and the Hamin Presbytery, a non-geographic Korean Presbytery. The committee recommended that the Korean Presbytery be integrated into the other presbyteries in that Synod. They also recommended the combining or realigning of Synods. The hope was that this would be more efficient, result in better support for churches, and a stronger witness to Christ. The committee had thoughtful people with an excellent moderator and support people, and dealt with hard issues prayerfully and with great concern. Although I would have preferred a different organization answer, it was a good experience.

In other areas, I had a strong feeling that God was at work in our denomination in very positive ways. Some of these things did not get the limelight. For example, there are 248 New Worshiping Communities started in the denomination! Not all will be fruitful and multiply, but many will. They are helping us think of church in new ways. Since good news stories are often ignored, some creative person thought of 248 beach balls as visible signs of God at work. As we celebrated by hitting them high from person to person all over the Assembly, we left that night being playful together as well as struggling together to discern God's will. When the music and the balls stopped, our Presbytery ended up with two balls ~ the equivalent to the number of the new worshiping communities that we will have here!

Another exciting factor that is to be celebrated is that we commissioned new mission co-workers and young adult volunteers. I celebrated the Mission Co-Workers from this Presbytery, Barbara Nagy, Becca Young, John McCall, Gary and Marlene Van Brocklin, Frank and Nancy Dimmock and all the people our churches support. I celebrate that Becca Heilman from Waldensian is going to Zambia to serve as a Young Adult Volunteer.

The PCUSA brought focus this year to the root causes of poverty. Last year, they emphasized 1001 worshiping communities in ten years, this year they encouraged us to "Educate a Child, Transform the World." We were encouraged to educate children in our communities and in the world. This is a thing Presbyterians do well. This is one way we can have a positive impact on the condition of women and children in our neighborhoods and across the globe. In this Presbytery, our churches are making a huge difference in this area, and I am sure we will continue this and more.

We were also challenged to live missionally. That is also a Presbyterian heritage. We are called to reach out to the unchurched and to the least of these. The Assembly said this is not a new challenge, but one we already have.

Finally, I had the privilege of serving with a wonderful team of commissioners. Each played a vital role in their committees and had tough assignments. We were diverse in many ways, but listened to each other. I learn so much from all of them, and give thanks for their gifts and thoughtful service.

In remembering this assembly, I think of a song that was sung multiple times in multiple places.

God of Grace and God of Glory on Thy people pour Thy power . . .

Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage for the facing of this hour, For the Facing of this hour

For the living of these days,

Lest we miss thy kingdom's goal

That we fail not them nor Thee

In remembering the Assembly, I more strongly remember the Biblical verse for the Assembly:

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in the believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

God of Grace and God of Glory on Thy people pour Thy power . . . So that we will open ourselves as individuals, a presbytery, and a denomination that "The God of hope will fill us with all joy and peace in the believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 221st GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2014)



HEATH RADA IS ELECTED MODERATOR OF THE 221ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2014)

- **Brief Summary from the General Assembly**
- **General Assembly Summary from the *Presbyterian Outlook* (bulletin insert)**
- **Pastoral Letter on Marriage**
- **Pastoral Letter from PFR and the Fellowship of Presbyterians**
- **Global Missions Letter from Rev. Dr. Hunter Farrell**

These documents may be found on the Presbytery Website:

<http://presbyterywnc.org/221st-general-assembly>

OR

the PCUSA website:

<http://oga.pcusa.org/browse/resources-resource/departments/ga221/>



The 221st General Assembly (2014)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
June 14 – 21, Detroit, Michigan
A Brief Summary

Election of the Moderator: Ruling Elder Heath Rada from North Carolina was elected the Moderator of the General Assembly on the first ballot with 52% of the votes from a field of three candidates. He has served as President of the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond and the CEO of the Greater Richmond chapter of the American Red Cross. As his Vice-Moderator he selected the Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia, pastor of Church of Forest Hills, a multicultural, multiethnic congregation in Queens, New York. Historically, election of a Moderator on the first ballot is not common; the last Moderator elected on the first ballot was the Rev. Jack Rogers who served as the Moderator of the 213th General Assembly (2001).

Mid Councils Commission 2 – Synod and Presbytery action: The 219th General Assembly established a Special Commission to study the structure of the denomination and make recommendations. The Commission's report to the last Assembly was sent back for further work by a somewhat restructured Commission. This year the Commission brought a recommendation to reorganize the current 16 synods into eight in a collaborative process based on “an emerging sense of purpose, partnership, context, and call.” The Assembly increased the number to 10-12 new synods and the Sinodo Presbiteriano Boriquen en Puerto Rico (Synod of Puerto Rico) successfully overtured to remain as is based on its cultural and geographic setting. In related business the Assembly granted the request of the Synod of Southern California and Hawai'i that Hanmi Presbytery be dissolved and the churches transferred to the corresponding geographic presbyteries. Hanmi did present an overture asking for a delay in the dissolution.

Divestment: Middle East and Fossil Fuels: Once again, the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee (MRTI) brought a recommendation to divest from three companies whose business dealings with Israel help support the Palestinian occupation: Motorola Solutions, Caterpillar and Hewlett-Packard. After intense advocacy by outside groups before and during the Assembly, and impassioned testimony and debate in committee and on the floor the Assembly voted 310 to 303 to support divestment. There were also numerous statements of support for both Israel and Palestine and a reaffirmation of the commitment to a two-state solution. In partial response to a controversial study guide issued by a PC(USA)-affiliated advocacy group earlier this year the Assembly added a first point to the resolution that reaffirmed Israel's right to exist.

The other matter was an overture to divest from companies that appear on the Carbon Tracker fossil fuel company list. The Assembly chose instead to refer the matter to MRTI for their study and recommendation.

It is worth noting that one of the financial officers of the Board of Pensions explained to the Assembly that most of their assets are placed with private investment advisers and when they receive the divestment instructions they do not have to divest but can keep any current holdings but will not acquire any more listed stocks.

Marriage: The Assembly took three actions related to Marriage regarding the PC(USA) Book of Order. They approved an Authoritative Interpretation permitting pastors to conduct marriage services, and the session may approve the use of facilities for such services, for any marriage in jurisdictions where they are permitted and in accordance with the conscience of the pastor and session. They approved a rewrite of W-4.9000, the section on marriage that, among other things now says marriage is between “two persons, traditionally a man and a woman.” Finally, they directed that a consultation process with presbyteries and churches be developed to promote reconciliation associated with these changes as the vote on the Book of Order amendment goes forward.

Other actions: The new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism was affirmed and the Belhar Confession will again be sent to the presbyteries for a 2/3 approval to be added to the Book of Confessions. Modifications were made to the Peacemaking Offering and it will be renamed the Peace and Global Witness Offering. A statement was issued about the need for due process regarding weaponized drones. The 248 New Worshiping Communities were celebrated. Mandatory background checks are urged when hiring pastors but it was decided not to add it as a requirement of the call process in the Book of Order. *Per capita* rate was set at \$7.07 for 2015 and \$7.12 for 2016.



Here we stand, so to speak: THE 221ST GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
DETROIT, MICHIGAN — JUNE 14-21, 2014

BY **LESLIE SCANLON**, *Outlook* national reporter
and **JACK HABERER**, *Outlook* editor

Following years of debate, the 2014 General Assembly decided to act — choosing to divest from three American companies whose products support Israel’s occupation of Palestine, and granting PC(USA) ministers permission to perform same-sex marriages in civil jurisdictions where such marriages are legal.

Realizing that their actions would please some and alienate others both in the United States and overseas, commissioners also pleaded for reconciliation with those who would disagree. “In no way is this a reflection of a lack of love for our Jewish brothers and sisters,” moderator Heath Rada said immediately after the divestment vote, one of the first by an American mainline Protestant denomination.

Asked after the votes on same-sex marriage how much it would cost to send representatives to each presbytery for conversations about unity, Stated Clerk Grady Parsons said he wasn’t sure, but “the cost of not doing this is higher.”

SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ASSEMBLY:

MODERATOR. The committee chose as its moderator Heath Rada (christened #modeRada on Twitter), the only ruling elder among three candidates, and a hearty North Carolinian who selected as his vice-moderator his demographic opposite: Larissa Kwong Abazia, a young Chinese-American pastor from New York. From the start, the young adult advisory delegates (YAADs) resonated with the white-haired Rada, who passed out Heath bars and danced during breaks on the platform.

DIVESTMENT. Two years after a GA rejected a similar proposal by just two votes, commissioners gasped when the divestment vote result was posted – 310-303 – for a proposal that the PC(USA) begin phased divestment of about \$16.5 million from three companies that provide equipment used by the Israeli military in the occupation of Palestine: Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions. The assembly did specify that its action was “not to be construed” as support of the global Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE. In response to the contention that the denomination’s restrictions were impeding pastors’ ability to provide pastoral care to committed same-sex couples in their churches, the GA approved two measures to permit ministers to perform same-gender marriages in jurisdictions where legal (at present, 19 states plus the District of Columbia).



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An authoritative interpretation, approved 371-238 (61 percent in favor), took effect immediately after the assembly adjourned, giving PC(USA) ministers freedom of conscience to perform same-sex marriages. The assembly also voted 421-175 (71 percent in favor) to recommend for ratification by the presbyteries a constitutional amendment adjusting the definition of Christian marriage, changing the phrase “a man and a woman” to “two people, traditionally a man and a woman.”

Both actions support freedom of conscience. The proposed amendment says explicitly, “Nothing herein shall compel a teaching elder to perform nor compel a session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service” that either of them “believes is contrary” to their “discernment of the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the Word of God.”

Adoption of the amendment requires ratification by 87 of the 172 presbyteries, the votes to be taken over the next 12 months.

BELHAR CONFESSION. The assembly approved recommending for presbyteries’ ratification (by two-thirds vote) adding the Belhar Confession, written in South Africa and focused on justice and reconciliation, to the PC(USA)’s Book of Confession.

BROKEN PRESBYTERIAN RELATIONS. Already 350 churches have left the PC(USA) for other denominations over the past four years. Now more departures are expected. Also, Hunter Farrell, director of World Mission, said preliminary inquiries indicate 17 of the denomination’s 54 global-partner denominations may break relations with the PC(USA) over the same-sex marriage decision.

LANGUAGE ABOUT ISRAEL. The assembly disavowed a controversial study guide, “Zionism Unsettled,” produced by the Israel Palestine Mission Network. The commissioners overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to trim back references to Israel in liturgical materials published by the church.

GUN VIOLENCE. The assembly appealed to fellow Presbyterians to work to reduce gun violence by advocating for stricter background checks and a ban on semi-automatic assault rifles.

FOSSIL FUELS. Despite pleas from the YAADs that “we can’t wait” to protect the earth, the assembly voted not to divest from fossil fuel companies, choosing instead to explore related issues that might lead to action by a future assembly.

DRONES. The assembly passed a resolution criticizing secrecy in the U.S. military’s use of drones for surveillance and targeted attacks, calling for legislation governing the use of military drones.

YOUNG ADULT COMMISSIONERS? A proposal to turn YAADs into voting YACs failed, given that the new title would not require them to be ordained elders.

MID COUNCILS. The assembly approved consolidating the number of synods from the current 16 to somewhere between 10 and 12 reconfigured synods. ●

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June 19, 2014

To congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Earlier today, the 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a recommendation from its Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues allowing for pastoral discretion to perform “any such marriage they believe the Holy Spirit calls them to perform,” where legal by state law.

They also approved a recommendation to change language in the *Book of Order* to indicate that “marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman.”

Both decisions came with much thought, discussion, and prayer, and clearly the entire body that is the PC(USA) will be interpreting these actions for some time.

Please know that the same triune God in whom we place our hope, faith, and trust in *is* still in control, and that the assembly’s action today is the result of deep discernment to hear God’s voice and discern God’s will.

We concur with the feelings expressed by Teaching Elder Commissioner Jeffrey Bridgeman, moderator of the Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues, during his presentation to the assembly.

“The apostle Paul tells us that ours is, in fact, ‘the ministry of reconciliation’ as ‘ambassadors of Christ,’ and he died for us so that we might be reconciled, that we might become reconcilers,” Bridgeman said.

In this season of both happiness and sadness over the assembly’s decisions, we call on you to remember the overflowing grace and love God gifts us with, and to take seriously our charge to bestow the same grace and love on one another.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,



Ruling Elder Heath K. Rada
Moderator, 221st General Assembly (2014)



The Reverend Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly



Ruling Elder Linda Bryant Valentine
Executive Director, Presbyterian Mission Agency

A Pastoral Letter from PFR and the Fellowship of Presbyterians

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Meeting in Detroit, our 221st General Assembly has taken two significant actions on the teaching and practice of marriage according to the PC(USA)'s Book of Order. First, the GA approved an Authoritative Interpretation (AI) that now permits PC(USA) pastors to conduct same-sex weddings, and allows sessions to approve the use of church property for such ceremonies. Secondly, the GA approved a proposed amendment to the Book of Order that would replace current language with a description of marriage as a relationship between “two people, traditionally a man and a woman.”

While the AI goes into effect immediately, the proposed amendment requires ratification by a majority of the presbyteries before any change could be made, a process that takes about one year. Both measures are designed to allow pastors and congregations to participate in same-sex weddings, in states where gay marriage is legal.

We grieve these actions by the General Assembly. We believe we will look back on this day and see the error of these decisions. But an Assembly of our denomination has spoken, and now we must move ahead without compromising compassion or conviction.

It is extremely important to understand that while the AI and the constitutional amendment broaden the denomination's interpretation of marriage, they do not require any pastor to officiate or any session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service with which they disagree. It remains up to each pastor and each session to determine what is and is not appropriate for their congregation.

Proponents of these two actions have made great effort to invite and welcome those who hold unwaveringly to a traditional interpretation of marriage to remain engaged in the mission and ministry of the PC(USA) with full integrity. Some will resolve to do this—others may not. Those of us who do remain in the PC(USA) will, no doubt, encounter other decisions and actions with which we will disagree. We are not here to fight and divide, but to continue to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and to testify to the transforming power of his love that is available to everyone. We urge you in the strongest possible way to refrain from actions, attitudes, and language that would mar the image of Christ in your response to the Assembly's actions.

Let us commit to one another, and to Almighty God, that we will seek to embody the grace and love of our Savior across our theological differences, and in personal and congregational deliberations about our future in the PC(USA).



20 June 2014

Dear Colleagues in Christ's mission,

May the peace of Christ be with you!

I write to you from the city of Detroit, Michigan, USA, where the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is holding its 221st General Assembly. We are thankful to God for this gathering of elected commissioners from all 172 presbyteries, and we are blessed with the presence of eight ecumenical advisory delegates from our partner churches. We deeply value and respect the opinions expressed by our ecumenical advisory delegates. They are participating fully in debate and their votes on the matters before the Assembly are communicated to the plenary as advice before each vote is taken.

The Assembly is considering a number of important issues that will impact our relationships with you, our partners around the globe:

- The Assembly enthusiastically approved the **“Educate a Child, Transform the World” Campaign** that has as its goal to improve the quality of education for one million children around the world. To launch the campaign, three congregations have joined together to pledge \$1.65 million to the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding project. We are thankful to be able to support our partners in their unceasing efforts to improve the quality of education offered in their primary and secondary schools;
- The Assembly addressed several issues dealing with the Church's witness in the **Middle East**, including the decision on whether to **divest** funds held by the PC(U.S.A.) from three U.S. companies which the Assembly established are profiting from non-peaceful activities in the occupied territories of Palestine. The Assembly voted to express urgent concern for the persecution of Christian churches in the Middle East and other areas of the world. Specific measures were taken in support of our church partners in Syria and Iran;
- **Several international concerns** were expressed by the Assembly: support for the normalization of relations with Cuba, concern for the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, concern for Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, and U.S. immigration reform;
- As you know, one of the more difficult issues before the Assembly is discerning how to respond to the current situation in the U.S., where 19 states have now legalized **same-gender marriage**. Increasingly, Presbyterian ministers are asked to bless these marriages. Some people in our church understand this to be a pastoral issue—they believe it is wrong



to withhold God's blessing from two faithful church members who have committed to love and serve each other; others believe that the issue is one of faithfulness to Scripture, that they understand to define Christian marriage as being between a man and a woman.

The Assembly considered a variety of overtures on these issues and voted to affirm pastoral discretion in performing marriage ceremonies. Thus pastors, with session approval, would be allowed to officiate same-gender weddings in states where such marriages are legal. This decision is effective immediately. Pastors and congregations that disagree with this decision are allowed to follow their conscience and officiate only marriages between a man and a woman. Thus, the decision by the Assembly allows Presbyterians with different convictions to continue in communion with one another as we have in the World Communion of Reformed Churches. In addition, the Assembly voted to change the definition of marriage to include two persons of the same gender. This change, however, would have to be ratified by a majority of the 172 presbyteries and, if ratified, would go into effect in June 2015.

We wanted to share this news with you directly, so that you are aware of this preliminary step our church has taken to respond to this issue. We have asked our Area Coordinators and Regional Liaisons to be in conversation with you to further explain the Assembly decision and to hear from you regarding your Church's understandings. Because we are committed to work in partnership with your church, we would not pretend to press our beliefs on your church regarding this sensitive issue nor would we suggest sending a gay or lesbian mission worker to churches for whom that would be inconsistent with their theological understandings.

As you can see, the challenges and opportunities before the church are many. The Good News is that the same God who called us together as a church will never leave us or forsake us. I invite you to join a concert of prayer that is forming around the world as our church meets in Assembly:

- Pray that the bitterness and divisiveness so present in U.S. society and in our church is healed as people are enabled by the Spirit to truly listen to each other and respect each other despite our differences;
- Pray that the decisions taken by the Assembly would glorify God and strengthen God's realm of justice, peace and righteousness.

May God richly bless you and your work in the coming days.

With you in Christ,

Hunter Farrell

Rev. Dr. B. Hunter Farrell
Director, World Mission
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Email: hunter.farrell@pcusa.org

