

Our Denver Presbytery Stated Clerk, Rev. Olivia Hudson Smith, has asked the commissioners from DenPres to make a presentation to the Presbytery Assembly at the August 11 meeting in Elizabeth, outlining our General Assembly experience focusing on “The future of the PC(USA) based on your experience as a commissioner”. However, a family event prevents me from being there. I will attempt to do so in this written form. Sort of an adult version of the grade school essays “What I did on my summer vacation.”

The question I’ve often heard since I returned home has been, “Did you enjoy GA?”. I always hesitate. Over the course of the time I was in St. Louis I felt inspired, humbled, moved to tears, motivated, and connected. I was sometimes limp with heat and humidity, or shivering in drafty air conditioning, frustrated, outraged, exhausted. But yes, overall, I enjoyed it – just not every minute.

I was inspired by the power of the opening worship service – the sense of connectivity and the Holy Spirit in that room was powerful, and the first time during the week of GA that I felt my throat close up and tears of joy fill my eyes. Also inspiring were the varied experiences of work and fellowship with many other commissioners from home and around the country, and friendships that formed.

Perhaps the thing that struck me as the most inspiring were the interactions with the Young Advisory Delegates (YAADs), beginning with but not at all limited to our own YAAD from Denver, Claire Wineman – they were always as much or more passionate and informed, articulate, and committed to the future of our denomination as any pastor or elder I encountered. I truly saw they are not just the future of our church, they are a prophetic voice in our church right now! We fail to listen to them at our own peril.

Commissioners do not get to pick their committee assignment. We were randomly assigned to one of the fourteen committees of GA. I was put on Committee 11 – Social Justice Issues. If I could have chosen, it would have been at the top of my list, so that must have been divine providence at work. Motivated by the challenging times we live in and to be given a chance to guide the choices of our church on issues of justice was truly a blessing. Hard, challenging, sometimes personally convicting and humbling, but so important. Our assigned overtures ran the gamut of issues – racial justice and reconciliation, continuing to heal our fraught history with people of diverse gender and sexual identities, addressing US drug policy, confronting our nation’s addiction to guns and gun violence, and likewise standing up to racist nationalism. Space here won’t allow much detail. For that I refer you to <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/committee/3000013/business> which lists the 25 overtures and recommendations on Committee 11’s docket and what actions we took and the outcome in plenary. The one thing I found most hopeful for the future of our ability to confront these issues is that in a committee of

General Assembly Commissioner Report-Cleve Dixon

Saturday, August 11, 2018

Stated Assembly Meeting



52 members of a variety of backgrounds I never heard voices raised saying that the status quo was acceptable on any of these things – there really was no conservative/ liberal divisiveness in any of our deliberations. Honest questions for clarity. Sometimes a maddening desire to parse words and phrasing ad nauseum. But nothing but an honest desire to find God’s will for his people – and that justice is at the very heart of the Gospel.

We didn’t all just sit in air-conditioned rooms reveling in a love of Robert’s Rules of Order. In addition to the work of the Social Justice Issues committee I was delighted to put action behind words in the Hands and Feet event joining in a march through the streets of St Louis on a sweltering afternoon to protest the practice of requiring cash bail of poor people who often are held indefinitely without trial for minor non-violent misdemeanors simply because they are unable to pay bail. Unlike those of us with resources they too often await trial in jail instead of at home. Often losing their jobs and being unable to care for their families. It is truly a horrid practice that recreates a modern version of debtor’s prison. The offering from the GA opening worship (and donations sent from congregations across the country) came to around \$55,000 which was used to bail out dozens of people. Sounds like a lot, but it’s only a symbolic gesture in a long movement to end this unjust system. For more info see how the PC(USA) is engaging in communities where GA is held see: <https://handsandfeet.pcusa.org/>

My experience was obviously focused on social justice issues. But the GA dealt with many other issues through the other committee’s deliberations and actions Sunday through Tuesday, and in plenary sessions of the entire GA that were held Wednesday through Saturday. Things of note I’d call out – a resolution on guiding our investment in fossil fuels to press for emphasis on development of renewable energy, creation of a team to develop a plan to guide the denomination on how to provide family leave for pastors and staff, the report of the Way Forward committee working to find how we can evolve our denominational structures to serve the church in a changing age. Immigration. The Middle East. And lots more.

To answer Olivia’s question on the future of the PC(USA) I am very hopeful. We certainly have challenges at every level from congregation to presbytery, to synod and the Office of General Assembly. But seeing the number of people from across the nation and world come together to discern God’s will for our future I can only see that through our connected nature we should never feel all alone. And that we are all called to engage in the world where God has planted us, stepping outside the doors of our churches into our communities to be the hands and feet of Jesus, loving and caring for our neighbors.

Respectfully submitted, July 19, 2018

Cleve Dixon