

## COMMISSIONER REPORT TO PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN NC

by  
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Attending the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the PCUSA as an elder representative of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina was both a privilege and joy. This was my fifteenth General Assembly, but my first as a commissioner with voting privileges. Therefore, being allowed “on the floor,” especially with our seats on the first row, made the proceedings feel personal and somewhat intense.

The many options which were available to commissioners and others, outside of the plenary and committee meetings, were enlightening and uplifting. As always the worship experiences were meaningful, and in many ways exhilarating. From the opening strains of “ALL CREATURES OF OUR GOD AND KING” to the final benediction of closing worship, we sang, we swayed to the music, we prayed, we valued scripture readings as interpreted through dance and art, and we worshiped with a sense of wholeness and unity as a denomination. The opening worship was remarkable in its use of art in the worship service. As we sang the opening hymn it was impressive to see the streamers, the paper animals which were twenty feet tall, and the people representing all parts of our culture and the world process into the worship hall. Of course having many thousand people singing together always moves me, and this time was no exception.

Speaking of worship, one of the meaningful parts of the assembly as a whole, was that each session was begun with worship which included time for prayers in small groups. Our delegation from WNC prayed together usually as a group. It was a time when we felt unity and shared love for Christ, and also for the Presbyterian Church.

Of course the election of the moderator was an exciting time. It always is, but this year, with our own Maggie Lauterer as one of the six candidates, it was especially so. Maggie represented our Presbytery well as her pastoral nature, and sincere interest and concern was evident in her speech as well as in her answers to difficult and somewhat unexpected questions. Her position as sixth person to answer questions was a definite handicap, but she handled herself with her usual grace. It was my privilege to nominate her, and to hear the many affirmations of Maggie throughout the rest of the week.

Our business was broad based and varied. This year there were nineteen committees, which was more than in past years. The reason for this was to decrease the numbers of people serving on committees since the large committees provide difficulty with logistics and participation. Even this year, many committees had 45 to 55 members, and the consensus seemed to be that that was too many people. However, I am not sure how the General Assembly Office will be able to add many more committees due to the time needed to report out in plenary sessions.

My job at the assembly was to moderate the Bills and Overtures Committees. It is a unique committee, as we did not deal with the issues before the assembly, but instead with those matters that make the assembly flow smoothly. New commissioner resolutions, protests and dissents, requests for circulation of literature to the commissioners, reviewing the minutes of the Assembly, visioning for future assemblies, and possibly most importantly, the development of the docket and the responsibility to keep it operating in a timely fashion, comprised the bulk of our work. In addition, our members were assigned to the various committees of the assembly in order to ascertain which items would require the most time on the docket, and to make sure the committees were flowing smoothly. In many ways, this committee has a “bird's eye” view of the overall happenings. It is a hard working committee, but one that is rewarding and even at times exciting.

Issues coming before the assembly this year were expected to bring about fireworks, which was

appropriate since we met over the Fourth of July. However, I found this to be the most congenial and non divisive assembly that I have ever attended. There was a spirit of cooperation, while at the same time there seemed to be informed and passionate callings for certain positions to be upheld or defeated. There were a number of issues which I believed to be the most provocative, though many others were also important and dealt with accordingly. The matters which seemed to bring about the greatest interest were:

**Rewriting the Form of Government section of the Book of Order –**

**Middle Governing Bodies restructure**

**The Middle East Study report**

**Ordination of homosexuals**

**Same sex marriage or holy unions**

**The Belhar Confession**

**Various Social Justice Statements including:**

**gun violence, the economic crisis, environmental concerns, compensation justice, etc.**

There were 124 overtures for consideration, and 13 commissioner resolutions in addition.

Among the many highlights of the Assembly was the commissioning of our new missionaries to go out into the world on our behalf in order to spread the “GOOD NEWS”. Announcements of major gifts to our world mission efforts were made at that gathering, and a sense of under girding our international mission work seemed prevalent.

Another new and interesting addition to this years assembly was the increased use of technology. We voted by electronic means, which minimized our voting time considerably. Each of us had a computer at our desk which was wired to a main circuit and enabled us to follow all the proceedings on line. This decreased a great deal of paperwork for commissioners. And committee moderators, like me, were provided with Blackberries (and were taught how to use them). Mine enabled me to be in constant contact with the stated clerk and the moderator, along with our committee assistants. This enabled me to be on top of matters when a change in the docket was needed, or some other matter was coming to the fore which needed direction by Bills and Overtures.

A protest on Friday was disruptive to the assembly. A group of gay and lesbian supporters (not related to our denomination) trespassed into the assembly hall, and marched up to the stage. Their point was that not enough support had been given to the issues on homosexuality, especially in the area of same sex marriages and holy unions. Because they were trespassing, and would not leave when asked, they were arrested and taken out of the assembly hall (which they did peacefully). Even those commissioners who sympathized with the demonstrator's position seemed frustrated and disappointed that this effort had extended the time for us to do the business at hand.

Finally, I would like to thank the Presbytery for this privilege. It was a joy to be with my fellow commissioners from the presbytery, as well as to participate in this important facet of our denomination's work.