

Presbytery of Boston
E-Connection
June 17, 2010

Forty Days of Prayer

In preparation for the General Assembly, the Association of Executive Presbyters has offered prayers and reflections for the 40 days leading up to GA. Dana Lindsley, Executive Presbyter in Southern New England, shared this recently:

Day 24 - 40 Days of Prayer - Dana Lindsley

As I contemplate our role as Presbytery Leaders (Executives/General Presbyters) at General Assembly and the role of commissioners, when we, as usual, have some quite controversial issues coming before the Assembly, this thought from Henri Nouwen inspires me about what we can be:

“In a world that constantly asks us to make up our minds about other people, a nonjudgmental presence seems nearly impossible. But it is one of the most beautiful fruits of a deep spiritual life and will be easily recognized by those who long for reconciliation.

When we are free from the need to judge or condemn, we can be safe places for people to meet in vulnerability and take down the walls that separate us.

When people realize that we have no hidden agendas or unspoken intentions, that we are not trying to gain any profit for ourselves, and that our only desire is for peace and reconciliation, they may then find the inner freedom and courage to leave their guns at the door and enter in conversation with their enemies.”

Hopes for the 219th General Assembly (2010) **Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly**

The Stated Clerk of the General Assembly has released his greatest hopes for the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to be held in Minneapolis from July 3-10, 2010.

(continued on page 2)

“Gradye Parsons’s Hopes for the 219th General Assembly,” *continued*

1. Prayerful decision-making

The spirit in which decisions are made at the assembly will be a prayerful and careful witness of decision-making for the entire church.

2. Deeper awareness of the whole PC(USA)

Commissioners and advisory delegates will gain a deeper awareness of the length and breadth of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), realizing they are part of something much larger than themselves.

3. Issues facing congregations

Commissioners and advisory delegates will discern with the whole church the issues and challenges facing congregations

4. Common calling to a changing church

A clear, common calling will emerge to actively and hopefully engage with the reality of a church in change.

5. Attention beyond ourselves

Attention will move beyond ourselves to a world in great need, committing ourselves to gospel work: making disciples, feeding the hungry, welcoming the outcast, encouraging the fainthearted, working for peace – all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. Enthusiastic sharing of the faith

Those who are part of the assembly will be the first in line of Presbyterians to talk about their faith with a contagious enthusiasm.

7. Furthering the mission of Christ

At the end of the assembly, commissioners and advisory delegates will have a deep sense that what they did will further the mission of Christ in the world.

The Reverend Gradye Parsons is Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Fourth Church Youth Video Goes to General Assembly

Presbytery colleagues-

Thanks to all who voted in the PC(USA) youth video contest. Our Fourth Church youth production is now one of the ten finalists and will be shown at GA. A different selection process will pick the eventual winner. You can still see the video at ymilive.org

Thanks again,
Burns

God's Presence at General Assembly

Wednesday, May 12, 2010,
By Sharon Youngs

Entering the General Assembly

Picture yourself approaching a rather large room ahead. Just inside the doorway you pour into a bowl the small amount of water you brought from home. You proceed to your seat, introduce yourself to those sitting nearby, and look around. Your seat and the thousand or so others are positioned around a platform similar to the layout of some church sanctuaries. At the top of the few steps that lead up to the platform is a baptismal font.

Soon a small number of people walk down the aisle and up the steps to the font. They fill the font with water that includes the small portion you brought as well as portions from the others who have gathered in the room. One of the leaders prays and then invites everyone to turn to those around them and pray together. After praying together, more than a thousand voices join in singing "Down to the River to Pray," by Alison Krauss. And then the gavel sounds to begin the first session of the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) this coming July in Minneapolis.

More Than Parliamentary Procedure

A Presbyterian General Assembly is filled with committees and plenaries and overtures and briefings and discussions and debates. But it is also filled with times for worship, Bible study, prayer, reflection, and music. A General Assembly is much more than parliamentary procedure and votes. There is a spiritual aspect to the assembly that undergirds and supports the legislative work. It is those times of worship and prayer that bind the commissioners, advisory delegates, visitors, staff, and all who have gathered from the east, west, north, and south for the assembly together into a community of faith.

This Year's Assembly

As plans proceed for the 219th General Assembly (July 3-10), specific attention is being given to how to increase and strengthen the spiritual aspect of the meeting. Here are some examples:

Bible study. Even before the commissioners and advisory delegates arrive in Minneapolis, they and everyone across the denomination will have available online through The Presbyterian Leader a Bible study written specifically for this assembly by Matt Skinner, a Presbyterian minister who teaches New Testament at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

The font. This year's theme, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38), lends itself well to baptismal imagery, such as the font that will be front-and-center of the commissioners and advisory delegates as they work to discern the mind of Christ for the PC(USA). While each of them will have brought a small portion of water to pour into the font, what is more important will be the rivers of living water that pour from them in the Spirit-led decisions they will make over the course of their week together.

Worship. The opening Communion service on Sunday, July 4, will include not only those who have traveled to Minneapolis for the assembly but also thousands more Presbyterians in the Twin Cities area. In addition, worship will be on the schedule each day, and the traditional ecumenical service will take place in Westminster Presbyterian Church, just down the street from the convention center.

Prayer. A room will be set aside for commissioners, advisory delegates, and others to use for quiet prayer, reflection, and meditation. The area is being designed by volunteer members of the Committee on Local Arrangements, a group of the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area that, along with other myriad tasks for the assembly, is planning the opening and daily worship services.

The opening prayer for each session of the assembly will take place around the baptismal font. New at this assembly will be the practice of inviting commissioners and advisory delegates to turn to a few others in the row in front or behind them to form small groups to pray on a regular basis.

But praying for the General Assembly is not limited to those who will be in Minneapolis! Individuals, sessions, congregations, and groups across the PC(USA) are encouraged to begin praying now for the meeting, for the Moderator who will be elected the first night of the assembly, and especially for those who will be serving as commissioners and advisory delegates. In addition, the Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, has written a call to prayer for the assembly that will be featured in the 2010 Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study on July 3rd, opening day.

Finally, the *Book of Common Worship* contains a prayer for a General Assembly meeting. You are invited to use it often before and during the gathering of what is the highest governing body of the PC(USA):

“Almighty God, in Jesus Christ you called disciples and, by the Holy Spirit, made them one church to serve you. Be with members of our General Assembly. Help them to welcome new things you are doing in the world, and to respect old things you keep and use. Save them from empty slogans or senseless controversy. In their deciding, determine what is good for us and for all people. As this General Assembly meets, let your Spirit rule, so that our church may be joined in love and service to Jesus Christ, who, having gone before us, is coming to meet us in the promise of your kingdom. Amen.”

(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993, 805)

Let's go down, down in the river to pray.

219th General Assembly Website

Follow the events of GA through their official website:

<http://www.pcusa.org/ga219/>

Overtures Being Brought Before the 219th General Assembly (2010)

By Sharon Youngs, www.ThePresbyterianLeader.com

Introduction

By the time commissioners and advisory delegates to the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) arrive in Minneapolis in July, they will know well the business before them.

Like every assembly that preceded it, issues before the 219th General Assembly reflect the amazing breadth of the work and witness of the PC(USA), both internally and in matters that span the globe.

The vast majority of business items are overtures—to date, 107 of them—that presbyteries have submitted to the assembly. Most overtures began with an idea from a session of a congregation who want their idea to be addressed by the entire PC(USA). The session then sent the overture to its presbytery for consideration, which, after being

approved by the presbytery, was forwarded to the General Assembly. Additional items of business include reports from assembly agencies and special committees, among others.

Because of space, this article cannot cover all of the overtures. However, every business item coming to this year's General Assembly, as well as a list of the GA committees, is available at <http://pc-biz.org>.

Standard Fare

Looking at the business issues coming to the 219th General Assembly (2010) could be likened to sitting down at a restaurant and studying the menu. A good number of menu options will be standard fare that can be found in several establishments, but with a slight twist of ingredients to put a particular restaurant's signature on them.

So it is with this year's assembly. As with the past several assemblies, the 219th GA will consider issues that have become standard fare for assemblies. The following percentages of subject matter are similar to at least the previous five General Assemblies:

Ordination Standards

Well over 25 percent of the overtures submitted revolve around ordination standards. Some overtures are asking the assembly to delete G-6.0106b1 from the Book of Order, some are calling for a new G-6, and others are asking the assembly to delay action on this provision of the PC(USA) Constitution.

Peacemaking and International Issues

A close second in percentage of overtures are those that address peacemaking and international issues. These items call for various assembly actions regarding the war in Afghanistan, peace in Sudan, refugees and the people of Iraq, mission and ministry in North Korea, and embracing nonviolence as our response to war and terror.

Because of the report of the Middle East Study Committee (172 pages and over 30 recommendations) and additional items that relate to that particular region of the world, an assembly committee has been formed to focus on Middle East peacemaking issues. Included on this committee's agenda will be recommendations to denounce, and another to divest from, Caterpillar, Inc. for its "continued profit-making from non-peaceful uses of its products" in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

PC(USA) Polity

Slightly less than one-quarter of business items focus on PC(USA) polity. Several of the overtures are in response to the recommendation that the assembly approve a proposed new Form of Government and send it to presbyteries for ratification. Some overtures ask that the Form of Government Task Force's work be received or postponed; one calls for it to be adopted as an "enabling" document. Additional overtures in this area have to do with items such as commissioned lay pastors, interim pastors, educators, and associate members.

The General Assembly

Several presbyteries have submitted overtures this year that address issues surrounding the assembly itself. They include the number of assembly committees, the standing rules, authoritative interpretations, who has privilege of the floor, whether an amendment to the Constitution requires a simple or two-thirds majority vote, young adult advisory delegates, the timeline for electing commissioners, how often the assembly convenes, and deleting the responsibility of a General Assembly “to decide controversies brought before it and to give advice and instruction in cases submitted to it, in conformity with the Constitution.”

Marriage

The definition of marriage is the subject of roughly 15 percent of this year’s overtures. A number of the overtures ask the assembly to affirm the current definition of marriage in the Directory for Worship as being between a man and a woman. In contrast, a number of them ask the assembly to change the definition so that the gender of the couple is not specified. These overtures will be considered by the assembly committee that will study the report of the Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage.

Special Menu Items

Theological matters

The 219th GA may be the first assembly to consider two changes to The Book of Confessions. A special committee is recommending the addition of the Belhar Confession to the book. Another special committee will ask that it continue until the next assembly in 2012 when it will bring a new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Middle Governing Body Issues

As a confirmation that the PC(USA) is in the midst of significant change, overtures before this year’s assembly call for actions to either eliminate synods or reduce their function, while others call for the formation of a non-geographic presbytery and synod. The assembly will also consider a recommendation from the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly to form a Middle Governing Body Commission.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Matters

The assembly will consider issues about relationships with and attitudes toward other religious bodies. Included among the items will be the report of the committee investigating the Evangelical Presbyterian Church as well as two study papers—“Christians and Jews: People of God” and “Toward an Understanding of Christian–Muslim Relationships.”

Cultural and Social Issues

Finally, speaking against violence toward pregnant women, addressing abortion, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the passage of the first social pronouncement of the Presbyterian church, making available resources regarding the destruction and loss of coastal wetlands, encouraging all Presbyterians to know their HIV status, and protesting

the “blatant disregard for the sanctity of our Lord’s name in motion pictures and public broadcasting” are just some of the examples of the remaining issues that sessions and presbyteries have been led to ask this year’s assembly to address. Commissioners and advisory delegates will have a giant feast, to be sure!

Endnote

1. “Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.”

About the Writer

Sharon K. Youngs is assistant stated clerk and communications coordinator for the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). She is a minister member of the Presbytery of West Virginia.

Prayer for General Assembly

“O blessed Trinity, in whom we know the Maker of all things seen and unseen, the Savior of all both near and far: By your Spirit enable us so to worship your divine majesty, that with all the company of heaven we may magnify your glorious name, saying: Holy, holy, holy. Glory to you, O Lord most high. Amen.” Book of Common Worship (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox press, 1993), 348.