

General Assembly 2010 Report
By Chuck Winder, Elder Commissioner

Good morning Boise Presbytery,

I left Boise for our 219th General Assembly with some apprehension about what might lie ahead during the next nine days or so. But when I arrived in Minneapolis I found plenty of friendly and helpful volunteers answering our questions and getting us from baggage claim to our transportation to our hotels.

I also found everyone that I came in contact with during the GA to be dedicated to making the week go well. For a large city, everyone was friendly and helpful. The schedule of events was mostly overwhelming. I usually started with a 6:30 AM breakfast sponsored by such groups as the Presbyterian Coalition or Presbyterians for Renewal. Our first few days were hours and hours of committee meetings. I found this to be a most enjoyable exercise, with the exception that as in most groups there are a few that want to dominate the discuss and the outcome. My general impression was that everyone on my committee, Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations were most respectful of differing opinions and were willing to listen.

Our normal day ended usually about 10 PM, so not a lot of time to read or keep up with the changes other committees were making to the original draft documents that we all spent hours and hours reading before we ever jumped on the plane to go to GA.

Even with the long days and difficult issues before GA, the days seemed to fly by. I was pleased to share the GA with Aaron and Mathew. They were great seat mates and were full of ideas, opinions and suggestions. The floor process worked well most of the time. One issue that you should know about is that individual handheld remote voting devices were troublesome the first evening. They were not working properly primarily because they did not allow enough time to train us on how to use the device. I am not sure if we really elected the Moderator or not, but after four votes they declared a winner and no one objected. By the way I think the new Moderator for GA did a great job of overseeing the GA floor activities.

As you know we voted on some very difficult issues and some of them did not come out the way I would have liked to see them, but every vote was very close, for example the one on ordination and ministry standards was passed by a mere 50 votes out of 726 possible. The vote on redefining the definition of who could marry was defeated by less than 100 votes. One last observation, it appeared to me that almost 75% of the supports of these very controversial issues where the clergy, especially those retired and the young seminary students, soon to be ministers. The Elder Commissioners were the ones that opposed these issues.

So I close with a sincere thank you to all of you for allowing me to represent our Presbytery at the 219th General Assembly !!! Also, a big thank you to Ruth and Edward for the bag of goodies and to Pastor Phil Moran for all of his support during the GA!!!

Chuck Winder

Dear Friends,

First of all, thank you all for giving me the opportunity to serve as minister commissioner to the 219th General Assembly last month. I can honestly say I have never experienced anything like it. While it was long, exhausting, emotional and at times even painful, it was also worshipful, inspiring, and filled with fellowship and good humor (and at times not so good humor. If I ever hear another “how many Presbyterians can you fit in a bus/restaurant/hotel/conference center” joke again it will be too soon!)

Worship on Sunday the 4th was an amazing experience. With over 7000 Presbyterians from local churches, around the country and across the globe, the assembly hall was packed. Music from many traditions, art forms that included movement, puppetry, and paintings, the celebration of communion (excellently orchestrated to serve 7000 worshippers in about 10 minutes), and even the celebration of baptism (a first for any General Assembly) made for an inspiring service in which to gather together and start off the week with all of our senses turned toward Christ.

After worship we broke into 19 committees to address and offer recommendation on the overtures before the assembly. Committees met Sunday afternoon and Monday and Tuesday from morning until late into the evening. I served on the mission coordination and budgets committee. Plenary began on Wednesday and met from 9am-10 or 11 pm through Friday and then concluded Saturday from 9-11.

My experience of General Assembly illustrated the fact that our denomination is divided on fundamental convictions. While we have agreed to be unified by polity and not theology, we are now struggling with the consequences of that decision in practical ministry. It is my sense that we disagree on such core issues as the nature of Scripture, the nature of humanity, the nature of Christ and the process of salvation. But without addressing the reality of our fundamental differences, we are still willing to debate practical ministry issues like ordination standards, as if we were coming from the same foundation. I found that process of debate without a willingness to address the source of our disagreements frustrating.

Nevertheless, the Spirit of God was present and at work in the midst of our brokenness.

Once committees and plenary had gone into recess, folks of all walks and convictions gathered around tables in the assembly hall, and at restaurants around Minneapolis and shared meals and stories of their families with one another. In the midst of our profound fractures, we could also witness fellowship. I saw unity in the midst of diversity around those tables. Perhaps it's time to address more attention to our unity than our diversity.

Thank you again for this opportunity!

May the hope, joy and peace of the Lord be with you,

Rev. Aaron Beaty