

“Persevering Toward Wholeness”

227 General Assembly Commissioner’s Report

“We worship the God who sends the Church into the World.”

COMMUNITY DAY- Saturday

Prior GA227 opening, I participated in the “Walk to End Gun Violence”. The community was invited to join GA227 participants at a downtown park listening, learning and participating in an activity to end gun violence. The event was led by Rev. Jimmy Hawkins who ironically was formerly the pastor of my mother’s church in Durham, NC. We witnessed a blacksmith make objects (statues, flowers, etc.) out of surrendered guns. Others who had been impacted by gun violence spoke of their trauma. Subsequently, the group walked to City Hall, formed a circle around the building, held hands and prayed for an end to gun violence. This was an impactful way to start the week.

SUNDAY

Sunday morning was devoted to worshiping with a Milwaukee Presbyterian Church of your choice. I attend Calvary, an older downtown church that was within walking distance. The elders alternate preaching in the absence of a called minister. The singing was absolutely wonderful and the preaching was inspirational. The members served a locally resourced lunch of bratwurst and root beer. A man who had just been released from either a hospital or psychiatric care, asked where we were going and he followed us there. It was obvious that he had not eaten for a while. The church members were very attentive to his needs. They demonstrated Christ in the world.

BUSINESS

Before actually working with a committee, I completed seven (7) mandatory preparatory assignments online. Next, I was randomly assigned to the GA Operations Committee (GAO) and participated in three days of on-line committee meetings, one lasting well into the evening.

In the GAO committee meeting, there were two areas that were most thought provoking. The GAO committee was tasked with recommending San Juan, Puerto Rico for the site of the 228 General Assembly. Meeting in Puerto Rico stirred the most controversy in the committee meeting. Negative and intolerant comments from a few committee members spilled out to the general body. GAO-01 Recommended Location for the 228th GA (2028). As approved, GA2028 will be the first time the Assembly is held outside the continental United States.

The GAO committee in GAO-02 was also tasked with recommending a vote on the issue of online plus in person meetings versus totally in-person Assemblies. Most

preferred in-person meetings. “If we are a relational church, then we need to relate in person.” The committee voted to recommend totally in-person meetings going forward. In the plenary, however, the Assembly was informed at this late stage of planning, Puerto Rico could not accommodate a totally in-person meeting, and no other sites were available to host an in-person meeting in 2028.

Therefore, the assembly voted to begin total in-person meetings at GA2030. Further, the in-person meetings should include financial support for in-person childcare. The leadership of Presbyterian life and Witness was directed to study innovative strategies and recommend how the General Assembly meets to conduct its business and report to the GA228. Commissioners voted to approve the amended overture 389 to 83.

The other fifteen (15) items that the GAO committee considered and recommended were added to the Consent Agenda and approved without amendments.

Every plenary began with worship. The first plenary of the day began after a message from an ecumenical minister who usually spoke on the theme of the conference. The message on Rev 22:1-5 moved me more than I anticipated. We had assigned seating with the commissioners from our Presbytery for voting and speaking. The electronic system had difficulty on the first day, but it was smooth going for the remainder of the week. Monetary issues seemed connected to the abolishment of World Mission. It was obvious that there is lingering mistrust of leadership because of closing World Mission and firing and mistreating the mission workers, especially if that action was presented as a cost saving measure. On each Assembly action that required funding, commissioners asked how the action would be funded. One Commissioner even asked what the total savings were for closing World Mission and how that money is being used. No answer.

Nonetheless, commissioners approved by a margin of 386-15, a unified budget for 2027 and 2028 for Presbyterian Life and Witness and the Presbyterian Church (USA), A Corporation, which includes the Administrative Services Group. The approved amounts for a balance budget are \$90,454,606 for 2027 and \$97,921,505 for 2028. The GA portion of per capita giving will be \$13.04 in 2027 and \$12.72 in 2028.

The Rev. Cynthia Holder Rice succinctly summarized the overtures and major actions taken by the GA. Therefore, I need not repeat those. The Assembly approved its first policy on artificial intelligence (AI) by approving RUS-08, “The Algorithm and the Almighty: Navigating Artificial Intelligence through a Reformed Lens.” While the policy is not binding for church officers and its leaders, it discourages plagiarism and strongly discourages the use of AI as a substitute for prayerful discernment when preparing for worship.

In RAC-04, the Assembly approved a number of items concerning race. One of the most important was developing denominational anti-racism training no later than September 1, 2027, that satisfies *Book of Order* training requirements.

HOSPITALITY/AMENITIES

The Presbytery of Milwaukee's members were stationed everywhere to welcome, guide, and assist us to make the stay memorable and enjoyable. They welcomed us at the airport, at the hotels, and at registration. There were approximately 96 Young Adult Advisory Delegates (YADDs), approximately, 20 Theological Student Advisory Delegates (TSADs) 17 Partner Advisory Delegates (PADs) from around the world (as an aside 2 were not allowed to enter the US in spite of having valid passports), and approximately 508 Commissioners from 164 Presbyteries in attendance as well as several hundred observers requiring attention.

Sunday evening on behalf of the Synod of the Covenant, Chip Hardwick, Synod EP, hosted dinner for synod members. The meal and fellowship were my most enjoyable time at the conference. The dinner provided a wonderful and comfortable opportunity to mingle with those with whom I am familiar and as well as those I did not know.

Members of the GAO committee met for lunch on Monday. This provided an opportunity to meet the members in person. The committee co-moderators planned fun activities to assist us in getting to know one another.

When our committee met on-line, our co-moderators advised us that the assembly hall was cold, and we should dress in layers. As a welcome gift, we received a blanket. We also received a credit card for meals that were not provided. However, they did indicate that they love it when you do not use all the money on the card.

A huge thank you to EP Terry Kukuk for the Starbucks, candy, snacks and Playdoh. Terry made me feel welcome and the goodies kept me awake through one amendment after another amendment to the amendment!

CLOSING ASSEMBLY

On the first ballot GA227 commissioners elected the Rev. Dr. Kristopher D. Schondelmeyer and the Rev. Marta Pumroy (whose family is from Puerto Rico) as the Moderators for the next two years which will culminate in their officiating at GA228 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The conference ended with worship which included the installation of the newly elected Moderators and a stirring sermon from the Rev. Laura Marilo Cheifetz as well as charges and blessings from outgoing Moderators, the Rev. CeCe Armstrong and the Rev. Tony Larson.

To the Presbytery of the Miami Valley, thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Sincerely,

RE Alice O. McCollum