

Jeff's Jottings

Making connections

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As Presbyterians, we say we are a connectional church.

Being connectional has what seems, today at least, like a checkered place in our life together: occasionally useful, to be sure, but mostly ancillary to your most important ministry work, and at times even seeming to get in the way. At its best, connectionalism is God's reign lived out in its very best ways, a gathering of people from the ends of the earth in common praise and ministry. At its worst, words that fly when the church's connectionalism is questioned — words like schism, heresy, orthodoxy, secession, dissenters, apostates — tend to fan the flames of separation, not connectionalism at all.

Someday, I may parse that previous paragraph in a different Jottings, maybe four or five Jottings. For today, I want to emphasize and point you toward a key element of our connectional system, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Now held every other year, the 223rd General Assembly convenes next Saturday, June 16, in St. Louis, with representatives (commissioners) from all 173 Presbyteries. This year, the PTCA is sending as its commissioners teaching elders Barbara Anne Keely and David Parker; and ruling elders Walter Rockenstein (also our current Presbytery moderator) and Phil Romine. Janimah Igwacho is our young adult advisory delegate. Stated clerk Barbara Lutter and I will be there as well, and I expect to see any number of PTCA friends and observers.

I encourage you to give some attention to what happens in St. Louis. Pray for the commissioners and their work. Worship with us. Follow the business. In all of that, I urge you to use the lens of education first. Inevitably, if you're paying attention, there will be times you'll want to affirm or critique; that's part of our connectional role. But so is using this remarkable gathering to see or hear something that might break open a new window of faith for you.

Here are some methods and links to get connected:

- Again, pray for our four commissioners and our young adult advisory delegate. Every day, ask that God's Spirit may strengthen and guide them.
- Get the General Assembly newspaper straight to your email daily! This year all Presbyterians (and others) can read the same daily newspaper that is available to those attending the 223rd General Assembly (2018). Sign up for e-delivery at <http://bit.ly/2M4lLff>.
- Beginning Saturday, June 16, a live stream of the week's proceedings will be available. Follow GA website link <https://ga-pcusa.org/>. You will find the live stream. Here's a couple of times you may especially want to join us:
 - Saturday, June 16, at 11 a.m. for opening worship.
 - Saturday evening, beginning at 7, for the election of the new moderator (or co-moderators).
 - Wednesday, June 20, at 9:30 a.m., when the plenary session begins with the ecumenical worship service.
 - Check the schedule for other key times or discussions.
- Follow the PTCA's Facebook page (<http://bit.ly/2IpKd9n>). Beginning Sunday, June 17, I'll put something up every day.

In these post-modern times, where tribalism seems to be the more favored direction, we build our connectional system on a profoundly Biblical foundation: one body, many gifts and functions. May General Assembly help us live out the faith to which we are called.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

I Corinthians 3:6-9