

General Assembly Report, Day 9 – Saturday, June 23

The advantage of flying to a General Assembly meeting is it gives you some time while you're waiting for transportation to the airport, waiting to get on the plane, and probably some time waiting for a connecting flight plus your time in the air, so you can collect your thoughts, reflect on the meeting, and then summarize what you have just experienced. When you drive, that doesn't happen. Well, you might have time to collect your thoughts and reflect on the meeting, but there's no way to write it all up, especially when you're the driver. All things considered, though, it's easier to drive if you can. That's what we did.

I thought I'd write something about the 223rd General Assembly on Sunday, but that day was just a lost cause. Monday hasn't been much better, but before we get too far removed from the 223rd General Assembly, I did want to write a little bit about what happened on Saturday morning.

There's not much time for business on the last day of the Assembly, as everything has to be wrapped up by noon, but we managed to squeeze some debate in nevertheless. The morning began with the report of Committee 3, General Assembly Procedures. It had been suspended on Friday night so the Assembly might have a better overall sense of how much money needed to be added to the per capita budget. The original budget proposal called for an increase in per capita from \$7.73 in 2018 to \$8.50 in 2019. The expenditures approved by the General Assembly added another 45 cents to that amount. After a lot of discussion, handwringing, and some complaining, that's what the Assembly approved. You could say they didn't want to do it. They tried to find ways to cut or limit spending, but they couldn't find a good way to do that. The Assembly had already approved the creation of a task force to look at ways to reduce the cost of the General Assembly meeting. (The best option seems to be reducing the length of an Assembly by a day, cutting back from 8 days to 7 days, or maybe even cutting back to 6 days. A more radical option would be to have these meetings every three years which could also be combined with reducing the number of days. We'll see what they do.) So, with mixed feelings, the Assembly approved a per capita rate of \$8.95 for both 2019 and 2020. They felt bad that there was going to be that much of an increase, but they also felt good about what was going to happen because of these additional funds.

Committee 10, Mission Coordination, dealt with the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) budget. They had been threatening all week that a significant increase in the Mission Budget would mean cutting current programs or cutting staff. Altogether, the Assembly approved items that would call for additional spending of \$1,030,978 in 2019 and \$857,305 in 2020. That seems significant to me. However, when your total budget is north of \$71 million in 2019 and \$70 million in 2020 that apparently gives you enough wiggle room to fit in a little over \$1 million each year. In the end, PMA said the financial implications can be dealt with with some difficulty. So, the Assembly approved the recommendation to make the adjustments necessary to accommodate the additional funds that they approved during the week.

There was then a report from the General Assembly Nominating Committee. The Young Adult Advisory Delegate Council presented gifts to the co-moderators and the Stated Clerk, making donations to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance for refugee work in honor of Cindy Kohlmann, for Puerto Rico hurricane relief in honor of Vilamarie Cintron-Oliveri and to the Poor People's Campaign in honor of J. Herbert Nelson. The Committee on Local Arrangements for St. Louis presented gifts to the co-moderators, and the Committee on Local Arrangements for Baltimore invited us to the next General Assembly, which will meet there June 20-27, 2020.

Ruling Elder Ekram Kachu, an immigrant from Sudan who attended the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary and who is now commissioned as pastor of the First Arabic Presbyterian Church in Waukee, Iowa, preached the sermon at the closing worship service. She mostly told the story of how that congregation came into existence. She said that one of her church members told her, "It's easier to

go to heaven than it is to be a Presbyterian.” While I would have rather ended on an uplifting note, there’s probably some truth to that.

I’ll offer a summary of the 223rd General Assembly perhaps by offering a Top 10 list of things to look into for my column in the presbytery newsletter later this week. Thanks for reading through my reports. I hope you’ve found them helpful.