

## General Assembly Report, Day 8 – Friday, June 22

Friday was an unusual day in a number of ways.

1) I skipped worship. I mean I never skip worship. I love worship, especially worship at GA. But I am tired.

2) I took a nap, actually two naps. The first came when I skipped worship. The second came when I skipped dinner. Now, technically, I didn't actually skip dinner. I had an apple and a brownie, but since I ate them on the way from the hotel back to the convention center, I don't think it should count as dinner.

3) I am wearing a bow tie today. I have not worn a bow tie since I was 7 years old, and it was a clip on. However, there were emails going around prior to GA urging mid-council leaders to wear bow ties on Friday. Since I still have my own insecurities and want to keep up with the "cool" mid-council leaders, I decided I should buy a bow tie so I could fit in. Wearing bow ties honors the late Bill Forbes, who was the floor manager at GA for many years until his death, and at least in my memory, he always wore bow ties. Bow ties also seem to be the favorite neckwear of our Stated Clerk, J. Herbert Nelson. Thanks to Amazon, my bow tie arrived before I left for St. Louis.

4) The bow tie I have on today is pink. I don't wear pink. However, the emails from my colleagues took a turn at the end of last week, suggesting we wear pink bow ties to support our female colleagues, many of whom have experienced sexual harassment. Since my blue bow tie had already arrived, I thought I was out of luck. However, Sarah Dingman, executive in the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, bought pink bow ties in bulk and was giving them away. She still had some available yesterday, so Maureen Wright picked two up so that both of us could be "cool." I suppose "cool" is a relative term. Anyway, I now have two bow ties.

But back to business: The report of Committee 8, Environmental Issues, consumed this morning and spilled over into the afternoon. Item 08-05, On How We Respond to Environmental Justice, went pretty quickly and was approved by a vote of 452-34.

Item 08-04, On Renewing Our Call to Promote Environmental Justice, was answered by the action on 08-05. That didn't take long either, with a vote of 478-10.

Then, the fun began. Item 08-01, On Directing the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation to Divest from Fossil Fuel and Actively Invest in Securities That Focus on Renewable Energy, was up next. If you like parliamentary procedure, you were in high cotton. There was a minority report, which was essentially Item 08-08, Mission Responsibility Through Investment Report. So we spent time perfecting the majority report, moved on to perfecting the minority report, then voted whether the minority report should replace the majority report to become the main motion. That happened, and then the Assembly voted to adopt the main motion.

Let me try to summarize this. Both sides agreed that God's creation is in peril right now and that we must be, we are called to be, good stewards of creation. Ultimately, we are called to save the planet, and we are all in agreement that we need to address climate change.

You could say the debate was over tactics. Should we divest from companies involved in the fossil fuel industry now, or should we allow the Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee to continue conversation with these companies?

All in all, it was a good debate, although it occasionally veered into the weeds. Here are a couple of telling comments. "Should we profit from industries that are harming the planet?" "Do we want to make headlines? Or do we want to make a difference?" "What message does complete divestment send to our families, families who are employed by the fossil fuel industry?"

Very rarely does one person have a significant impact on the outcome of a debate. It seems to me, though, that a member of Committee 8 did today. She was a ruling elder commissioner from South Louisiana Presbytery who married into the Presbyterian Church and whose family has been employed by

ExxonMobil for three generations. She made an impassioned, well-reasoned presentation on adopting the minority report. I think she may have changed some people's minds.

One of the surprising things that happened during the debate was the Assembly turned down the request to adjourn for worship. That really should have been an order of the day, but someone must have forgotten about that. Eventually, about 15 minutes later, the Assembly reconsidered the motion and voted to move to worship.

As the afternoon session began, there were still 5 committees left to report. After what seemed like an interminable debate, the motion to continue working through the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee to engage in conversation with fossil fuel companies passed by a vote of 409-106.

Item 08-02, On Adding to the General Assembly Divestment List, was answered by the response to Item 08-01 (which was actually what was originally proposed in 08-08). The vote was 406-87.

Item 08-10, On Engaging Environmental Investments, was also answered by the response to Item 08-01. The vote was 416-79.

Item 08-12, On Supporting Carbon Pricing (which supports lower prices on lower carbon fuels and higher prices on higher carbon fuels), was approved by a vote of 404-93.

Item 08-03, On Engagement with the Issue of Climate Change, which called for the creation of educational material for understanding this issue, among other things, was approved by a vote of 486-41.

Item 08-07, Precautionary Principle: Managing Technological Risks to Protect Humanity and our Planet, was approved by a vote of 470-32 but only after we spent some time wandering around in the weeds.

While all this took longer than it needed to, the Assembly did good work on these issues.

Committee 11 then had a chance to continue their report. They had started on Thursday morning when another committee finished earlier than expected, but they were only able to bring up two items before worship and then lunch intervened. It took more than 24 hours to get back to their report.

Item 11-25, To Reconstitute the Racism, Truth and Reconciliation Special Committee, was approved by a vote of 448-13.

Item 11-07, A Resolution to Respond to Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls, which corresponds to an action of the 2016 General Assembly that addressed the plight of African-American males, was approved by a vote of 475-14.

Item 11-11 was Declare an Imperative for the Reformation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in being a Transformative Church in This Intercultural Era. A quick reading seems to call for resisting discrimination based on class, gender, race, sex, or sexuality. It passed by a vote of 440-59.

Item 11-22 was a Commissioner's Resolution On Advocating for the Citizens of Puerto Rico. Co-moderator Vilamarie Cintron-Oliveri, who was born in Puerto Rico, stepped down from the platform to speak to this. I think she will help us be aware of the continuing needs in Puerto Rico as they still recover from the hurricanes of last fall. This was approved by a vote of 486-12.

Item 11-18, Responding to Racist Nationalism, was approved by a vote of 451-48.

Item 11-14, On Praying for a Movement of the Spirit to Engage Presbyterian Congregations in Nation-wide Action to Prevent Gun Violence, was approved by a vote of 472-24.

Item 11-02 was On Calling for an Immediate Moratorium on All Executions. A commissioner from Pennsylvania who is also a guard in the state prison system moved that this item be amended to include the commutations of all death sentences to sentences of life imprisonment. The amendment was approved and the item as amended was approved by a vote of 463-43.

Item 11-09, A Resolution on Sexual Misconduct in the PC(USA), calls for bringing clergy sexual misconduct to the light. There were several attempts at amendment. Some passed. Others didn't. In the end, the vote to approve was 474-19.

Item 11-23 was a Commissioner's Resolution On Appointing a Commission to Consider Social Impact of Automation. After dickering around on this, the Assembly decided by a voice vote to disapprove it. That took us to the dinner break.

When the Assembly reconvened at 7 PM, there were still three committees left to report. First up in the evening session was Committee 03, General Assembly Procedures.

Item 03-11, On Amending Standing Rule B-2 e to Anticipate Need to Adjust Number of Advisory Delegates, was disapproved by a vote of 481-17. This keeps the current plan for selecting Advisory Delegates in place.

Item 03-19, On Standing Rules a 3, A 3 c, (6) and A 3 e Define Clearly Meaning of Concurrence and Role of Overture Advocates, was split into three sections. Each was approved by a voice vote. While this might be important, it didn't seem that way.

Item 03-22 was a Commissioner's Resolution On Directing the Office of the General Assembly to Develop a Plan for Cost Reduction Measures for Meetings of the PC(USA) General Assembly. It seemed like a good idea to everyone and was approved by a voice vote.

Item 03-23 was another Commissioner's Resolution On Permitting Advisory Delegates to Have a Full Vote in Moderator Elections in Future General Assemblies. Many Young Adult Advisory Delegates seemed exercised by this. Some were for it. Others weren't. In the end, it was referred to the Office of the General Assembly to bring a recommendation to the 2020 General Assembly. It was approved by a vote of 357-138.

Item 03-09, Session Annual Statistical Report Update, replaces the current questions on the Session Annual Statistical Report with some new questions. Not many people seemed to care, but I'm sure clerks of session and stated clerks did. It was approved by a vote of 437-57.

Item 03-06, GA Committee on Representation Recommendations, was approved by a vote of 473-19.

Before moving on to item 03-01, the chair of the committee reported the invitation of Salt Lake City to host the General Assembly in 2024.

Item 03-01, Joint Committee of the General Assembly/Presbyterian Mission Agency Budget Proposals for General Assembly Per Capita Budgets 2018-2020, began to address the elephant in the room. What do you do with a proposed budget that will not support all the financial implications that have been passed so far with more potential costs still to come with two more committees yet to report?

The Assembly broke into small groups to discuss this. They then reported back. There was no real clarity. They eventually decided to postpone the vote to tomorrow morning. I think that's a bad idea because there's not going to be a lot of extra time to deal with this before we leave at noon. Some complained that this was a bad idea because they were going to leave tomorrow morning before we adjourn. (Note: That's always a bad idea but even more so when you're scheduled to vote on the budget.) After discussion, the Assembly voted to postpone dealing with this by a vote of 321-129.

Committee 06, Church Polity and Ordered Ministry, was up next. There was an audible groan when the big screen showed that they were bringing 20 items to the floor. Some were simple. Others were not.

Item 06-02, On Amending G-3.0307 to Clarify the Responsibility of the Presbytery, actually corrected an unintentional consequence of an amendment that was approved by the 2016 General Assembly. It passed by a vote of 464-3.

Item 06-11, On Amending G-2.0401 Regarding the Composition of a Congregational Nominating Committee, didn't seem like a big deal. It was approved by a vote of 478-3.

Item 06-12, On Amending G-3.0201 Composition and Responsibilities of the Session, tried to bring back language that had previously been in the Book of Order that allows a moderator to appoint a member of the session to moderate a meeting if they were sick or couldn't be there. Although this sometimes happens anyway, the Assembly disapproved it by a vote of 348-143.

Item 06-21, Advisory Committee on the Constitutional Findings on Authoritative Interpretation Request 18-01, deals with the question of whether a non-PCUSA minister can moderate a session. Basically, this says that Formula of Agreement Pastors (from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, United Church of Christ, and Reformed Church of America) that are in installed positions can moderate meetings and that other pastors may do so if they meet certain specific conditions. The Assembly voted to approve this by a vote of 473-19.

Item 06-06 was On Amending G-6.04e to Require Two-Thirds Affirmative Vote to Amend the Constitution. A few people thought it was important. Most didn't. It was disapproved by a vote of 428-54.

Item 06-01, On Amending 06-01 to Resolve a Conflict Between the Book of Order and the Laws of Some States, was disapproved. I have few notes on this, so there must not have been much discussion or else I was falling asleep. The vote was 470-16.

Item 06-NB, To Create a Task Force on Family Leave, generated a lot of discussion. It calls for a six-person task force to study, work, pray and discern on the issue of paid family leave for PC(USA) employees, including but not limited to ministers. The Assembly finally voted to approve this by a vote of 416-64.

The Committee recommended that the action on 06-NB answer Items 06-13, 06-14, 06-15, and 06-17. The vote was 407-86.

The Assembly voted to disapprove Item 06-03, On Adding G-2.1104 Administrative Personnel Association (APA), by a vote of 461-11. Apparently, the main reason was that members of the Administrative Personnel Association were not all necessarily Presbyterians, so we don't really have jurisdiction over them. At least that's what I remembered.

Item 06-20, A Resolution to Require and Expand Family Leave Policies, strongly urges all synods, presbyteries, and congregations to create a Family Leave Policy. It was amended to call for a minimum of 12 weeks paid leave. The final vote to approve was 395-83.

Item 06-10, On Adding a New Section G-2.1104, Administrative Personnel Association, was answered by the response to 06-03 by a vote of 458-11.

Item 06-08, On Amending G-2.0301 to Allow Congregations to Elect Individuals as Ruling Elders Without Requiring Them to Assume a Seat on the Session, generated a lot of discussion. Some felt there were genuine reasons to allow this to happen. However, the Assembly disapproved this item by a vote of 425-57.

Item 06-22, Advisory Committee on the Constitution Findings on Authoritative Interpretation Request 18-02, deals with a request seeking to resolve a perceived tension between our constitutional commitments to unity, diversity and openness on the one hand and historic principles that we are governed by presbyters on the other. It comes out of a dispute in the Synod of the Northeast. In the long run, no authoritative interpretation was offered, but the Department of Constitutional Interpretation is to develop constitutional amendment(s) that might accomplish the intended goal. This didn't seem all that important to me, but it passed by a vote of 440-25.

Item 06-04, On Amending D-2.2003b Regarding the Definition of "Offense," changes the language in this section of the Rules of Discipline so that it now reads "Sexual Abuse as defined in Section D-10.0401c shall be considered contrary to the Scriptures or Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A. and therefore an offense for purposes of these rules." The Assembly approved this by a vote of 416-13.

Item 06-19, A Resolution to Amend the Book of Order D-11.0403a, was referred to the Task Force working on revisions of the Rules of Discipline by a vote of 481-16.

Item 06-24, In Response to 06-16 from the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly, among other things removes the time limit for charging that a person who knew or reasonably should have known of the reasonable risk of sexual abuse of another as defined in D-10.0401c or failed to take reasonable steps to minimize the risk. Both charges may be brought regardless of the date on which an offense is alleged to have occurred. This passed by a vote of 455-16.

Item 06-19, A resolution to Amend the Book of Order D-11.0403a, was referred to the Task Force on the Rules of Discipline by a vote of 451-10.

Item 6-07, On Amending G-2.0509 and D-10.0401d When Former Ministers of the Word and Sacrament Who Renounced Jurisdiction While Being Accused in a Disciplinary Case Wish to Work for the PC(USA) Again, was answered by the response to 06-09 by a vote of 478-2. That's the closest this Assembly ever came to having a unanimous vote.

It was around 11:15 PM when the Assembly finally got to the report of its last committee, Committee 12, Middle East Issues. It only took 35 minutes to deal with this report. I expected the Assembly to go to at least 2 AM. I'm glad I was wrong. There were only five items coming from this committee.

Item 12-02, On Advocating for the Human Rights of all Citizens of Israel, was amended to call on the US government to rejoin and reengage with the United Nations Human Rights Council. The vote to approve was 433-22.

Item 12-11 was a Commissioner's Resolution, Resolution on Reconciliation Ministries in Israel and Palestine, which directs the Presbyterian Mission Agency to identify grassroots organizations and ministries (especially for youth) in Palestine or Israel working for radical, systemic change. There was a substitute motion that became the main motion, but there was actually little debate or emotion, perhaps because it was such a long day. The final vote was 458-10.

Item 12-10, On Gaza Violence, expresses sorrow and grief at the deaths of Palestinians killed recently in protests at the Gaza border and urges both US and international support for basic human values for all Palestinians and Israelis. It passed by a vote of 439-14.

Item 12-09, On Jewish Christian Dialogue and the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, was amended so much by the committee that it was considered "an alternate resolution." It passed, though, by a vote of 442-18.

The last Item, 12-07, On Urging RE/MAX to Stop Facilitating the Sale of Property in Israeli Settlement Colonies, (who knew RE/MAX sold property in Israel?) passed by a vote of 393-55. Apparently, RE/MAX responded at the last minute and accepted little responsibility for the situation in Israel since that is essentially an independently-owned franchise set up in that country. Anyhow, it passed by a vote of 393-55.

So, we wrapped up the last full day of the General Assembly. Tomorrow will bring closing worship, greetings from Baltimore Presbytery, which will host the Assembly in 2020, and dealing with both the per capita and mission budgets for 2018 and 2019. We'll see how that turns out.

Disclaimer: I did my best to take notes on vote totals but may not have gotten them right, especially tonight when I wasn't at a microphone. Where the mid-council leaders sit is a long way from the screens. To get an accurate vote count as well as to learn more about each item, check out PC-Biz at <https://www.pc-biz.org>.