

## A View from the General Assembly in St. Louis

Having come to my first General Assembly as a commissioner in 1997 and attended all but one since, we are changed and changing as a church. Some will point to diminished human and financial resources, and that is certainly true. The Way Forward Commission and the 2020 Vision Commission acknowledge that we have to be clear with the membership and resources God has given us how we are going to define our purpose and mission with the issues we face locally and globally in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Toward that end we have selected J. Herbert Nelson and Diane Moffett as the General Assembly's Stated Clerk and Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA). Their election signals our future will increasingly include persons of color leading us. And while our commissioner Bertram Johnson and Seattle commissioner Eliana Maxim lost on the fourth ballot by 13 votes to become co-moderators, another of our Synod of the Northeast commissioners, Cindy Kohlmann, and Tropical Florida Presbytery's commissioner Vilmarie Cintron-Olivieri were elected our General Assembly Co-Moderators. Vilmarie often adds "la lengua del cielo" in her prayers for us.

Not only is the PMA encouraging new worshiping communities to begin, it is encouraging the revitalization of existing congregations with new resources and dedicated staff time. Ten presbyteries are invited into a pilot project to bring vitality to cohorts of existing congregations and their leaders--and if we are willing, NYC Presbytery has received one of those invitations. The Assembly also addressed providing more attention to the 441 African American congregations, 70% of which have no installed pastoral leadership. To build better communications, the Assembly will need to hire additional staff and take more time to assist our growing multilingual denomination having resources in their own languages (taking our cue from Pentecost and the growing realities of our constituencies). We also expressed more intentional caregiving for persons long ostracized as LGBTQIA+ also part of or seeking to be part of our PCUSA family of faith.

As the General Assembly moves into the wider world, we honored the work of Liz Theoharis and William Barber with the Poor People's Campaign. We had an "action" in Louisville. After speaking with local organizers about important justice issues, the opening offering was given for bail relief in St. Louis. Hundreds of Presbyterians, with local organizations, walked from a spirited conversation there to the Justice Center where persons have been imprisoned, pre-trial, because they cannot pay bail. A check of \$47,000 was handed over to free some imprisoned. The racial divide is perceptible in St. Louis. Another walk from Louisville to St. Louis by dozens of Presbyterians took place before the Assembly began that brought attention to climate change and a call for our divesting from the Fossil Fuel industry.

We recognized the mission service of Young Adult Volunteers and Mission Co-Workers around the world. Simon and Maura, two of our YAVs from NYC, led a well-received and humorous orientation to the process of voting with electronic keypads. I stopped to speak to Leisa, and introduced our moderator Sandy Lane, to her as one working as our mission co-worker in difficult conditions in South Sudan where warfare continues daily, as does a growing Presbyterian Church. The GA spent time discussing how to be supportive of peace efforts on the Korean peninsula. All PNYC overtures on global concerns in Madagascar, the Northern Triangle in Central America, and Syria committees approved with overwhelming support. We in the PCUSA are concerned about our siblings in our nations. Our speaker at the Ecumenical Service of Worship grew up in Beirut, was denied theological education but came at the invitation of Princeton Seminary and got it anyway. She is now an outspoken leader of Middle East

concerns and connecting these concerns with the global ecumenical community. Looking around by badge color you can see the ecumenical and missionary advisory delegates present.

The Assembly is less contentious than earlier ones I have attended, but that does not mean we do not passionately disagree on some items nor are unanimous in our actions though there are far less majority and minority reports to debate. The Jarvie Commonwealth Service overtures from two presbyteries (NYC and Huntingdon) provided one committee a striking contrast of viewpoints that the commissioners were given the task of voting on a way forward. They did so with a call for the co-moderators to form a team to identify and engage all parties in a peacemaking and reconciliation process and report back in 2020.

We worshiped, we were led in Bible studies, we prayed many times over personal and larger concerns. Conversations among friends old and new ensued all week, including over meals among caucuses and groups with special interests. The Young Adult Advisory Delegates are pushing the church to never forget them and the children whose lives are shaped by the actions or inactions of adults—including the US Government separating children from parents at our borders, which we also addressed.

There is far more to report than what I can share here and the Assembly is still in session as I type. However, to get a fuller picture you can read more of the specific actions at the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly's PC-Biz {link} or through the Presbyterian News Service {link}. Thank you PNYC for sending commissioners and overture advocates. At least 25 persons for the Presbytery of New York City were among the hundreds gathered to observe, speak to issues, coordinate activities, and network on important issues before the church.

Robert Foltz-Morrison

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert Foltz-Morrison", written in a cursive style.