34th General Synod Reflections

What can be said concerning the 34th General Synod, which was held in Indianapolis, IN? This biannual meeting of the greater church is always a wonderful event in which we experience God in profound and unexpected ways. It is also a biannual reminder that the local church setting and the national setting are not looking at the universe (or world) through the same lense.

When we are at church, association or even conference meetings, we often discuss "mission" issues. When we are at national meetings, we discuss "justice" issues. The two are *not* incompatible, and often are discussing the same issues and are felt with the same longing for hope, cure, and love, but the methodologies of the two do not always line up as we would hope.

There were seventeen resolutions before the General Synod this year, of which 15 were resolutions of witness (two were more or less the same and were combined into one resolution by the committee that discussed the two similar resolutions). I encourage you to read the final resolutions and to prayerfully consider each of them, even the one we did not adopt, for they are all thought provoking and worthy of meditation.

Perhaps the most significant acknowledgement this year was that the Afro-Christian Convention deserves to be recognized as one of the founding streams of the United Church of Christ. We now will discuss the five streams, instead of the four. The four streams are the Evangelical, the Reformed (both from the German tradition), the Congregational and the Christian (from the English tradition). The Afro-Christian tradition was loosely connected to the Christian branch but was entirely from the black community; they educated, served and loved the Black Church and community from the Post Civil War era to the time of the merger and their history is rich. There also seems to be more acknowledgement that there are many streams that make up the river of the United Church of Christ, but these are the headwaters.

We also elected our first woman (and of color) as our General Minister. I have to admit that I was caught off guard by that fact. What I found more important for me is that we hired from within. What I mean is that Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson was one of our Associate General Ministers and has been a vital part of our national staff for many years. She is a gifted leader and has a vision for us. I hope she is able to spend time with us as we walk into the undiscovered country of our future.

We spent some time with the three other Pennsylvania conferences and I am excited for the future of the Keystone Project. This is a burgeoning discussion between the four Pennsylvania Conferences concerning the possible merger into one Conference, in an effort to better use resources and talent as a whole in an effort to better serve the local churches of the state. We have far more in common with one another than obstacles blocking our progress. There is much work and discussion to be done, but a burden shared is a burden halved.

The last issue I will note is the decision to move to a triannual Synod system. There are still some issues that must be addressed, for example the length of national committee tenure. Right now, a person is on the national board for six years (three synods). There is discussion of lengthening the tenure to nine years in an effort to only need to elect one third of the board at each synod. Another option would be to keep the six year term as is, but then we would need to elect half the board at each synod. The nominations committee believes that that would pose too great a burden to find that many people every three years. There is concern that asking someone to commit to nine years, however, might actually be a much harder sell.

Since this was my second Synod as your delegate, I am rotating off as a delegate and somebody else can fight it out! Thank you to York Association and Penn Central Conference for allowing me to serve and I continue to pray and support our Parent Church. God Bless.

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