

It was a great honor, and a true gift, to serve as Savannah Presbytery's Teaching Elder Commissioner to the 227th General Assembly in Milwaukee Wisconsin. I had the pleasure of working with Marti Stein (Ruling Elder - First Savannah) and Arianna Perez-Roblero (Youth Advisor - Iglesia Latina) - both of whom inspired me with their insight and wisdom. And, of course, our Stated Clerk the Rev. Deanie Strength, who leads with the energy, intelligence, imagination and love of her ordination.

Although I was once a commissioner before, having been sent by Savannah Presbytery to the 225th Assembly in St Louis, I was especially impressed with the leadership of this assembly. The Rev.s CeCe Armstrong and Tony Larson did a remarkable job of moderating the meetings - balancing the seriousness of the work with both humor and compassion in our deliberations. The body wrestled with some weighty considerations, and navigated through various types of amendments, but the poise and presence of the moderators kept us grounded and considerate in our work. And as a result, the decisions we made together came with a character of unity - even though nearly none of the outcomes were unanimously supported.

There were voices and stances in our meeting that represented a wide spectrum of theological understandings. From the conservative "Presbyterians for the Kingdom" to the progressive "More Light Presbyterians", space was made to hear and consider the input of a variety of standpoints. One of the outcomes of the Assembly that will be of particular interest to all parties is an initiative directing the denomination to develop new studies and theological frameworks addressing human sexuality, gender, and contemporary Christian families. The new theological framework will examine human sexuality, gender, the nature of flourishing relationships, and the Christian calling of family life. This study will be undertaken over the course of the years leading up to the next General Assembly and there will be a report for future commissioners to consider and evaluate in their decisions.

Throughout the Assembly, commissioners were made aware of the financial implications of our decisions. There were a number of times when the body decided to modify our decisions because of the financial impacts on our per capita responsibilities. However, in the end - even with sincere efforts to keep finances in mind, particularly for small churches, the per capita amount was increased.

Together, the commissioners prayed, we discussed, we disputed, we paused in the middle of our deliberations to sleep on a particularly long evaluated item, but in the end we came to decisions that feel good for the whole of our denominational body. There are some who will be frustrated, some who will find our decisions controversial, but in the balance the work we did will keep the PCUSA vital and relevant in the world as it is. And better still, our decisions were faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. And let us be in prayer for the way God would have the Church go - who the Lord would have us be; as individuals, as churches and as a denomination together with others at the Table of faith.

With sincerity and hope,

The Rev. Dr. John G. Ruehl, IV