Reflections from the 227th General Assembly

NCP Family in Christ,

The following pages provide a series of reflections from our new Stated Clerk, the commissioners, and the delegates whom National Capital Presbytery sent to the 227th General Assembly of the PC(USA) in Milwaukee. You will find their descriptions vary in their formats, just as each of our team had varied experiences. For those who have not been to GA, it is an inspiring and uplifting experience. Each person will have an experience that is their own. I have been honored to attend two and a half GAs myself: overture advocate and alternate in 2018 in St. Louis, Commissioner to the 2020 GA that was online from Baltimore due to COVID (the ½ GA), and Commissioner to the 2022 GA in Salt Lake City. I have also served for the last six years as your Bills and Overtures chair since 2020. As I look forward to handing over the reins to Elder Lou Durden, my final report to the Presbytery comes in this compilation of experiences from those who represented NCP at the 227th GA in Milwaukee this summer.

Before their thoughts, I'll give a quick report on those items NCP voted on prior to GA 227. Early this year, sessions of two of our churches proposed that NCP concur with four overtures to GA 227. While concurrences are no longer required for overtures to reach GA for decision, they serve as votes of support from Presbyteries. Those four overtures were:

- Overture 003/GEN-01, "On Confession, Repentance and Renewed Theological Engagement Regarding HIV/AIDS and Human Sexuality" (Gender and Sexuality Justice Committee)
- Overture 034/CLJ-02, "On Changing Course for a Green Future" (Climate and Environmental Justice Committee)
- Overture 035/CLJ-03, "On Establishing the Green Future Fund" (Climate and Environmental Justice Committee)
- Overture 036/CLJ-04, "On Regenerative Farming" (Climate and Environmental Justice Committee)

All four of these overtures were passed by their committees, recommended for inclusion in the consent agenda, and passed as part of the consent agenda. This was especially surprising for CLJ-02, "On Changing Course for a Green Future" as similar overtures for the PC(USA) to divest from fossil fuels have been proposed to the GA since the 222nd GA in Portland in 2016. Through the amazing work of the Holy Spirit, divestment was passed whole-heartedly with the support of both Mission Responsibility Through Investment and the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy.

In Christ,

Elder Mark Eakin
(Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church)

Overview from Stated Clerk Rev. Alex Evangelista:

From June 22nd to July 2nd, National Capital Presbytery sent a remarkable group of commissioners and delegates to the 227th General Assembly of the PC(USA) in Milwaukee, gathered under the theme "Persevering Toward Wholeness." Commissioners from our presbytery were ruling elders Beverly Johnson, Jackie Moore, Kristin Ford, and Jesy Littlejohn; teaching elders David Douthett, Emma Horn, Elizabeth Brookens, and Rachel Vaagenes; Theological Student Advisory Delegate Erin Sanzero (Duke Divinity School); and Young Adult Advisory Delegate Sofia Turkman. Our General Presbyter, John Molina-Moore, was there as well, and I had the honor of being there too, both as your brand-new Stated Clerk and as a corresponding member through my service on the Advisory Committee on the Constitution. I spent much of my time resourcing the Theological Education and Ordination Committee, and I was grateful for a few chances to resource the wider assembly as well.

As my first reflection to this presbytery, I want to lift the reflections of the commissioners who carried our presbytery's voice into that room. I asked each of them what stayed with them, and here is some of what they shared! (Note: I shared with commissioners that their quotes may be used but that I would not name them directly)

For several, this was their first General Assembly and the wonder of it came through clearly. One commissioner called it a "great learning experience" and said they felt "so glad AND HONORED to be counted among the Commissioners representing NCP." Another found themselves amazed by the "obvious passion exhibited, graciously, by participants," alongside the discovery that "PCUSA would hands down win an acronym contest with the US Army." Presbyterians do love our acronyms, ha!

One of our commissioners reflected on the weight and the gift of the work together. They wrote about feeling "honored to represent NCP and engage with elders from around the globe in the effort to discern God's will on very weighty matters," and named the NCP commissioner team itself as one of their gifts from the week, an "amazing array of spiritual gifts, experience and deeply held faith," with a sense of humor they called stellar.

Another commissioner described the assembly as "both beautiful and heartbreaking," shaped by how many of the decisions touched the lived experiences of people they love. Their most memorable moment came in the details of the work itself: offering the first "amendment to an amendment" on the plenary floor, a deeply Presbyterian act of getting one word, "shall," into the place it needed to be!

And yes, there is deeper work still ahead of us as a church. One commissioner shared, "there are more things that unite us than divide us," even as "we must persevere towards wholeness so that we may see flourishing and liberation of all creation." Another found hope in the process itself, in watching discernment happen across a large and diverse body. The assembly "made the PCUSA richer and also closer knit" for them, through the new friendships and unexpected common ground found there. This diversity includes the young people in our midst, as a commissioner called it a "very fulfilling experience" to learn how youth participate directly in the life of the church, and hopes to see young people stay involved in the presbytery and future assemblies. One commissioner summed up the whole experience about as honestly as one could,

sharing that General Assembly is "hard, tiring, sometimes mind-numbing – but also joyful, exhilarating, and remarkably hopeful."

Indeed, as NCP Presbytery Member, Denise Anderson (Corresponding Member, Previous Co-Moderator of General Assembly) offered a reflective word that has stayed with me. She described learning that she does not always need to use her own voice, that when the system is working, "the Spirit speaks to the body," and often someone else says what needed to be said before she gets the chance. "It's a beautiful reminder," she wrote, "that God is in charge." Amen!

Reading through these reflections together, what strikes me most is not any single theme but the range itself. First timers and veterans, ruling and teaching elders, all describing a week in such different ways. That range feels worth naming. The church we serve together is not one voice but many, and General Assembly asks all of them to sit in the same room and discern together, all for the glory of God. As your new Stated Clerk, still learning the shape of this presbytery, I find comfort in this. Whatever comes back to us in the amendments ahead, I trust we can meet in the same way: honestly, prayerfully, and *together*.

I want to name – and join me in thanking – each of them: Elizabeth Brookens, Beverly Johnson, David Douthett, Emma Horn, Jesy Littlejohn, Jackie Moore, Kristin Ford, Rachel Vaagenes, Erin Sanzero, and Sofia Turkman, along with Shani McIllwain, Denise Anderson and John Molina-Moore, for the way they carried National Capital Presbytery into General Assembly. General Assembly asks a lot of the people who attend it and these reflections tell me our presbytery sent people who gave a lot and received a lot in return!

A separate Stated Clerk Advisory Letter will follow soon, which will walk through the amendments coming back to our presbytery for a vote and what each would mean if approved. Also in this NCP *NOW!*, you'll also find some selected highlights and short overviews of other General Assembly action items that I find helpful for further study. For now, I simply want to say thank you, to God for this church and to the people who represented us so well!

Highlights and Short Overviews of General Assembly Action Items by Rev. Alex Evangelista

The 227th General Assembly discerned their faithful responses to many issues and opportunities facing the church, and how the church may interact with the larger world. While some of these highlights and overviews may also be found in resources from the PCUSA website or from the *Presbyterian* Outlook, I offer these selected highlights and short descriptions for your further study. I invite you to click the PC-Biz links, which will take you to the Business Item and include the (amended) approved action and the rationale offered by the sponsoring body. Some of the action items have comments and resources attached.

Before diving into the highlights, I want to name an important distinction. The action items I highlight below include statements or policies, meaning the General Assembly is speaking on its own behalf and on behalf of the commissioners gathered for the 227th General Assembly. These statements do important work: they authorize entities like the *Office of Public Witness* to advocate using that language on the church's behalf, since the Office does not speak on issues the Assembly has not addressed. *Yet,* a General Assembly statement is not binding upon any church,

member, or council. It does not mandate agreement, and it does not infringe on anyone's freedom of conscience. ***Rather,*** these statements can serve as resources, something a session may use for adult education, congregational reflection, or discernment about their own convictions. *This is different* from amendments to the Book of Order, which require a vote by a majority of presbyteries before taking effect, and which do carry constitutional weight if approved.

Below, I highlight these action items, and a future Advisory Letter will share information on amendments that require our presbytery's discernment and hold constitutional weight.

Below are some highlights:

- GEN-09 - Instructing the development of a comprehensive theological framework and study guide that addresses human sexuality and gender, which reflects our denomination's commitment to full inclusion of all people. https://myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001501
- GAO-01 & 02 - Approving the 2028 General Assembly to be held in Puerto Rico (https://myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001535) and committing to a fully in-person assembly in 2030 (https://myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001435)
- RUS-07 - A Social Witness Policy to "Standing Against White Christian Nationalism" https://myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001498. This action item includes urging "all leaders and members of the PC(USA) to familiarize themselves with ideology, practices, and goals of white Christian nationalism."
    - Note: this is a social witness policy (see the distinction above) and is different from RUS-01, which proposes an amendment to F-1.0305 and will require presbytery ratification https://myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001414.
- RIW-01 - Authorizing a commission to study the dismissal of PC(USA) mission co-workers, with the intent of transparency and reconciliation https://myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001417
- RIW-04 - Naming Israel's war in Gaza a genocide and how the church may respond https://myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001425
- RUS-11 - Honoring the life of Renee Nicole Good, a Presbyterian that was killed in Minneapolis, and acknowledging all those killed at the hands of ICE https://myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001576
- ORD-14 - Creating a Korean American Roundtable for the renewal of the Korean American church's mission in our denomination https://myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001532

These are just a few of many actions taken by the 227th General Assembly. Commissioners and Advisory delegates worked long and hard on their faithful response, and we are thankful for them!

If you have any questions about any other action items, please do not hesitate to reach out. I look forward to sharing more with you all soon, especially as we prepare to discern our action on proposed amendments.

In Christ,

Alex Evangelista

Initial thoughts from Teaching Elder, Rev. Emma Horn (Immanuel Presbyterian Church)

From my committee, Committee on Theological Education and Ordination (CTEO):

ORD 07: This was our biggest item of business and includes lots of different aspects. The one aspect that feels important to me to lift up is the ordination exam portfolio piece. While our presbytery is already open hearted about the ordination process and alternative exams, this is a really big change for a lot of presbyteries.

ORD 03: Collaborative Ministries. I'm excited about the possibilities of how this will play out. It's really just in the initial stages right now, so there isn't a whole lot to say yet.

From other committees:

CLJ 01: Divestment (and other related pieces) It feels important to mention this piece because not only did the body vote to divest but that they did so within the consent agenda, which is a huge change from the way that these environmental justice pieces have gone at GA in the past.

The work of the RUS committee just as a whole made some huge stands, and the body voted to lean into some very justice centered language and work.

GEN 06, whose language I've pasted here. **Direct the Unified Agency to develop and implement an additional mechanism in the Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP) for the Church Leadership Connection (CLC) that:**

1. **Allows congregations to indicate their openness and readiness to call an LGBTQIA+ candidate, and**

2. **Allows any candidate to view the congregational response about their openness and readiness to call an LGBTQIA+ candidate and filter search results by those responses.**

3. **Is developed in consultation with the Advocacy Committee for LGBTQIA+ Equity and organizations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that have demonstrated experience in LGBTQIA+ education and accompaniment in the call process.**

Serving as a Ruling Elder Commissioner to the 227th PCUSA General Assembly

Kristin Ford, RE, *New York Avenue Presbyterian Church*
(as prepared for New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, July 2026)

Earlier this summer, I had the privilege of representing New York Avenue Presbyterian Church and National Capital Presbytery at the 227th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), along with a group of other commissioners and advisory delegates. Each presbytery sends a delegation of ruling elders as well as pastors (teaching elders) to consider and vote on the business of the church, as well as worship together.

General Assembly is a special time, of gathering alongside hundreds of other Presbyterians for worship and discernment, and carrying out the governance of the church – making decisions collectively about the church.

Each commissioner and advisory delegate was assigned to a committee and we reviewed the business assigned to our committee in advance, then had three days of virtual meetings to engage in our committee work and make recommendations to the whole assembly. A few days later, we all traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin where we met in-person for five days for the plenary portion of our work.

General Assembly Relationships Committee

I served on the General Assembly Relationships committee, which was tasked with reviewing reports on agencies and entities reporting to General Assembly (such as Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, and the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church). We also spent a full day considering the Organization for Mission (essentially a governance document) for a newly unified agency of the denomination, Presbyterian Life and Witness (PL&W), which integrates and streamlines work previously carried out by two separate parts of the PCUSA structure- the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency. This unified structure is led by the Stated Clerk and Executive Director, the Rev. Jihyun Oh. We considered 30 amendments and engaged in lengthy discussion, ultimately recommending unanimously to the full assembly a revised organization for mission for PL&W. (The organization for mission was later approved by the full body as part of the consent agenda.) We had a number of complicated and fairly legally dense items to consider, made more complex by the significant feelings of hurt from the way in which the denomination's global mission work had shifted as a result of unifying these two agencies. Some mission co-workers (previously called missionaries) had their roles shifted or revised and other positions were eliminated (more info here) and there was extensive conversation both in my committee and on the plenary floor about ensuring accountability for these decisions and making changes to ensure there would be more clarity going forward.

Some Key Decisions Made by General Assembly

Ordination

We spent a lot of time talking about the requirements for ordination for ministers, seeking ways to be more flexible and collaborative. We voted to create a committee to develop

recommendations for an approach to ordained ministry in which ministers serve together as part of ministry teams, supporting faithful ministry in congregations by drawing on their particular gifts to meet the evolving needs of the church. In addition, we created more flexibility to assess readiness for ordination, broadening beyond the historic system of ordination exams to allow for alternative means of "senior ordination portfolios" or a combination of ordination exams and senior ordination portfolio items. These portfolios can take different forms but allow candidates for ministry to demonstrate their grasp of the key theological and polity concepts necessary to serve as a minister and can be especially helpful to candidates who are neurodiverse or for whom English is not their first language. Presbyteries will create a way to evaluate these portfolios, ensuring that evaluation practices are consistent, transparent, and informed by anti-racism, intercultural competency, and equitable assessment principles.

Gender and Sexuality

After extensive debate, we voted to add an optional feature to the church's form used when calling a pastor, allowing congregations to indicate their openness and readiness to call an LGBTQIA+ pastor. There was also a highly politicized resolution referencing polyamory that was referred to the PCUSA Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy for discussion as part of a comprehensive theological framework that we voted to commission. (This framework will take the form of a document and study guide that will address the nature of relationships and human sexuality in contemporary contexts, including relationships in marriage and family, the church, the workplace, and society in general; questions of respect, accountability, mutuality, consent, dignity, fulfillment, and care; the dynamics of power in human relationships; and the full spectrum of relational and family structures. It will also draw on theological and biblical foundations; ethical considerations regarding power, discrimination, and misconduct; current findings from peer-reviewed research in medicine, biology, psychology, and related sciences; guidance for the use of inclusive and non-binary language; and recommendations for action regarding previous policies or documents that need to be updated or rescinded. This recommendation continues the work of the 223rd General Assembly, which approved "On Affirming and Celebrating the Full Dignity and Humanity of People of All Gender Identities.") We also overwhelmingly voted to declare that the PC(USA) supports all individuals being able to access all medically necessary, evidence-based gender-affirming healthcare.

Divestment from Fossil Fuel Companies

We passed via the consent agenda an item of business concerning further divestment from fossil fuel companies, directing the denominating to divest from companies whose primary business is based on the extraction, refinement, transport, or sale of fossil fuels, with the goal of fully completing this divestment by 2030 or as soon thereafter as prudent management allows.

Genocide in Palestine

We voted overwhelmingly, and without much debate, on language stating that the government of Israel has violated the international law prohibiting genocide in its war in Gaza. The resolution directs the PCUSA Office of Public Witness to advocate against U.S. military sales to and purchases from Israel, and encourages people to avoid products from Israeli companies linked to

violations of international law, as well as condemns antisemitism and Islamophobia and affirms that criticism of the Israeli government is not inherently antisemitic.

AI

Commissioners and advisory delegates have a very lively debate about artificial intelligence (AI), ultimately approving a new social witness policy, "The Algorithm and the Almighty: Navigating Artificial Intelligence Through a Reformed Lens," an ethical framework for using AI, and creating an Advisory Committee on Technology and the Future as a permanent committee of the General Assembly to speak to and on behalf of the church on matters related to emerging technologies.

Christian Nationalism

There was a robust conversation at General Assembly about Christian Nationalism, especially in light of the nation's 250th anniversary this year. We voted overwhelmingly to declare White Christian nationalism "a theological error." Anytime the General Assembly votes to change the language of the Book of Order – essentially our Constitution– changes must go to the presbyteries (regional governance bodies) to be ratified. This resolution changes the text of the book of order, stating that we reject "any ideology that seeks to establish Christianity as a privileged or dominant force through the power of the state, or that conflates religious identity with national, racial, or ethnic supremacy" and will be voted on by the presbyteries before the 228th General Assembly. We also voted to urge congregations to "examine national symbols displayed on church property and in worship spaces, especially the U.S. flag, national and patriotic hymns sung in worship, presentation of colors in worship, and the propriety of national pride in relationship to the primacy of God in Christian worship."

New Confession

A special committee had been formed by a previous General Assembly to write a confession, a statement of what we as a church believe. We voted to create a special committee to continue studying and revising the confession and report to the 228th General Assembly, which will meet in 2028.

Honoring Frances Taylor Gench

The Rev. Dr. Frances Taylor Gench, who many at NYAPC know and love, was recognized with the Excellence in Theological Education award, a wonderful tribute to her four decades as a gifted seminary professor and groundbreaking New Testament scholar.

Election of New Moderators and 228th General Assembly

Rev. Marta Pumroy-Cordero and Rev. Dr. Kristopher Schondelmeyer were elected as the moderators of the General Assembly and will serve for the next two years and moderate the 228th General Assembly, which will be held in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

It was a challenging and rewarding experience to engage in collective discernment about the future of our denomination through the online committees and the plenary in Milwaukee. I'll be

sharing more about my experience and the decisions we made at General Assembly in a two-week Adult Christian Education series on October 18 and 25 at New York Avenue and welcome any questions in advance of that, or via email, at kristin.elisabeth.ford@gmail.com.

Serving as a Young Adult Advisory Delegate to the 227th PCUSA General Assembly

Sofia Turkman *(Saint Mark Presbyterian Church)*

My name is Sofia Turkman, and I was a Young Adult Advisory Delegate for the National Capital Presbytery at the 227th General Assembly this summer. This was my first time attending a General Assembly, and I learned a lot during the process. I enjoyed it very much overall. I have attended Saint Mark Presbyterian Church in North Bethesda, MD since 2012. I grew up with a strong identity as a youth in the church. The PCUSA is all I have ever known. The theme of the General Assembly was "persevering toward wholeness", with the guiding scripture being Revelation Chapter 22 Verse 2 which says: "on either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." I feel this verse resonates a lot in our world today. In a broken and divided Earth, society, and sometimes even church, God calls us to be these leaves of healing as we show up as Christians in the world. The fruits of our labor and service to Christ in whatever form they may take have a restorative power.

Stepping out of my little Saint Mark and DC bubble in Milwaukee was shocking in both positive and challenging ways. I quickly made friends from various states across the US and discussed funny cultural differences and what our home churches were like. It was interesting meeting people who were part of enormous congregations, but also people from congregations smaller than mine. It was surprising to see differing realities under the same denomination.

Before arriving at GA, I thought that everyone in the PCUSA thought the same way and had similar experiences. I thought that being in this church body meant you agreed with everything it stood for. It was a reality check to see otherwise. I was surprised to encounter groups with whom I strongly disagreed with that were a part of the same church body as me. I then realized that I was actually viewing belonging to the greater church as a means to separate myself from the people I didn't agree with, rather than a place to encounter all of God's people. Rather than separation, General Assembly became an invitation to engage outside of my comfort zone in new ways. At an ecumenical worship service during GA, the Rev. Dr. Kevin Vandiver spoke about the Revelation theme verse in his sermon, which emphasized that the tree of life is also on *both* sides of the river, not just one correct side, breaching every form of human divide. God is working even in those people we may view as misguided, in ways we cannot always see. God does not call us to be the *same* in any way, or to agree on everything, but rather he calls us to be *one* in Christ Jesus. While some theological disagreements appeared unresolved at the end of GA, I have faith that young adults and other generations alike will persevere toward wholeness within our denomination. Seeing meaningful overtures such as those on the Climate & Environmental Justice committee pass was encouraging. GA was a meaningful experience for me and I look forward to continuing my involvement with NCP and GA in whatever capacity moving forward.

My Brief Thoughts and reflections on General Assembly 227

Rachel Landers Vaagenes, TE, *Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church*

Once every other year, Presbyterians conjure up a 500-headed bishop to make decisions about the life and work of the Presbyterian Church (USA). I was blessed to be one of the heads in Milwaukee this year. Together, commissioners met, discussed, debated, and voted. We were the hands and feet of the PCUSA, representing the 166 presbyteries and 1,019,003 members, along with partners from other countries and denominations. And (to continue with my body-parts metaphor) this call was not for the faint of heart. It was a 2-week long meeting, (first week fully virtual, with some sessions lasting over 8 hours!).

We were randomly placed into committees that had been formed based on the submitted overtures. I was selected for the Racial Justice Committee. The subject was weary and weighty, but the three-score delegates met our task with grace and gratitude. It was startling to see that the main thrust of the overtures before us were trying to deal with previous GA approved actions *that had gone nowhere or whose status is unknown*. What does it mean to pass a motion if it is never acted upon or completed? My proudest accomplishment: a motion to establish a centralized place where anyone can track progress on past GA motions (RAC-05). Presbyterians love a good chart!.

We worked, sang, prayed, and struggled to move this work forward. Even with best intentions at heart, it was difficult for those in the margins to feel supported and seen. Technological and social difficulties cropped up everywhere, and it was slow, patient work. But this group was not cynical or defensive. And (miraculously!) we made decisions and made friends.

Then we traveled to Milwaukee, a welcoming place (home to the Bronze Fonz), but also one touched with poverty and brokenness. The beer was local and good. The lake was great. We shared the Baird Conference Center with a Pokémon and Topps trading card convention, and the Fire Marshalls of Eastern Midwest. Local PCUSA churches welcomed us into worship services across the region.

The plenaries themselves were overwhelming. Over 1000 people gathered into a massive climate controlled (read: freezing) room, where delegates sat with their presbyteries while observers and support staff gathered in the rear. No peanuts or tree nuts allowed. Our delightful National Capital team was composed of four Ruling Elders, four Teaching Elders, a Young Adult Advisory Delegate, and a Student Advisory Delegate.

Day one was plagued with technical problems, but again, patience was key. The first real vote–a Consent Agenda omnibus motion with 64 overtures–came quickly, and, despite my preparation and reading in the nights before, I felt unprepared to put my "aye" on such a large sum of actions. This was the first of many times that I trusted the work of others because of the good experience I had had during committee work. I did not agree with everything included, nor was I deeply informed on most of them, but I trusted my siblings who had done the work over the previous week, and I trusted the Holy Spirit. I knew then what it was to be a part of a whole.

Some debates were long, other votes were over before you could say "point of order." Things that would have been unheard of even a few years ago passed without much fuss. We voted to

call the Israeli Government's actions a genocide, and to divest from fossil fuels definitively by 2030. Christian Nationalism was declared a "theological error."

Other debates were difficult but excellent, regardless of whether I agreed with the outcome: the discussion of AI (referred to a future GA); whether or not to explicitly label pastoral searches as LGBTQ+ welcoming (approved); and how to address the poorly handled restructuring of World Mission and silencing of mission co-workers (passed a substitute motion to create a review commission).

Some debates felt uncharitable and ungracious to me, especially (and unsurprisingly) concerning matters of sexuality. There were times when groans from the body sought to silence a comment, or applause erupted, despite rules against editorializing.

This bled out into the halls and the internet. A small but visible group of young delegates and observers under Presbyterians for the Kingdom (PotK), dressed formally and in somber tones, clashed with the rainbow-haired and tattooed queer and affirming YAADs in a manner reminiscent of the Jets and the Sharks. Older delegates were equally tempted to view others as existential threats. Insults were common, and not always theologically grounded in love.

I (being no hero but not wanting to fall into fear and hate), tried to connect with curiosity and listen to understand, and befriended one PotK family, with three young girls in tow. The first conversation was talking-point heavy ("polyamory," "Biblical authority"), but I tried to respond honestly and openly, and eventually statements became questions. Over three days I talked with this family, played with their kids, and didn't make fun of their clothes or their beliefs. (I'm saved by the Blood and anointed by the Spirit! What can these poor kids and their skirts and suits do to me?) In the end, through tears and a surprise hug, my new friend thanked me and said, "I'm going to tell my pastor about you, and about the things you said."

The topics at General Assembly were weighty, and while I didn't always agree with the decisions–and while the actions of one small protestant denomination may not move the needle very far on the global stage–it is important to be able to move forward together. Some of these decisions will greatly affect congregations, and some will never even make a ripple in the local pew. But I think that the PCUSA should resist seeing victory in a vote at the expense of a relationship. How we get there matters. I was grateful for the trust, vulnerability, and mutual forbearance present in the NCP delegation. I do believe that God was in our midst, in the frustration and the joy. And only now, after GA's conclusion, do I feel truly qualified to serve. But I was proud to serve as a representative of my presbytery and my denomination, and I thank you all for the opportunity.