

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

*Romans 12:2-3*

## **Body Wisdom**

General Assembly starts this week, with a brief opening plenary session which can be viewed online tomorrow (Tuesday), at 8 am Mountain Time—that means 7 am Pacific Time. Because this year's format has committee meetings on Zoom, the beginning of GA seems kind of quiet, so I ask that you take a moment to pray for our commissioners, Melinda Forbes and Deidra Goulding, and for all the people participating in the decision-making of the GA. Melinda, Deidra, and I will be going to Salt Lake City this coming Saturday, and will return on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, but they are doing the hard work! You can follow the GA, and watch the online meetings, at <https://ga-pcusa.org/>.

GA gives folks a glimpse into the essence of the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is, of course, the gathering of individuals from across the denomination, chosen by the Holy Spirit through the voice of the presbyteries to discern together the will of God for this church. For many, it is the first time they see the breadth and depth of the PC(USA)'s commitments to action in the world. It has been the most dramatic demonstration of our rules of governance, used at times to guide us, or distorted by the adversarial intentions of those seeking power in the church. And, it is a big family reunion.

I am astounded at how many hours are put into this event every other year, especially by volunteers. The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA), Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC), and the host presbytery are among volunteers who put in countless hours planning, reviewing, advising, and taking care of an infinite number of details to ensure that those who participate in GA are taken care of. This is topped by the huge number of hours each GA commissioner and advisory delegate puts into their work—not only the long hours of meetings for almost two weeks, but the many hours of preparation, reading all the overtures and reports presented to each GA, and learning whatever technology platform will be used at GA to interact and vote.

One of the most important tenets of GA is the role of the commissioners—those ruling and teaching elders who are elected by every presbytery to come and vote on the various issues that need to be considered. The commissioners are being entrusted to discern the will of God for the whole church, so they are not representing the concerns of their presbytery, or their own personal views. As with every level of the PC(USA), we believe that the best way to discern the will of God is for the people of God to gather with prayer and humility, seeking to hear God's wisdom through each other's voices. We believe in corporate discernment—that is, we all have a bit of God's wisdom, so as we are gathered, we have a better chance of hearing more of that wisdom as a body. That is perhaps the biggest challenge for leaders new to the PC(USA), that we do not consider any individual to have all the wisdom, so we consult with others for nearly any decision.

And people take this responsibility incredibly seriously. I was blessed to help coordinate a prayer room for the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, held in San Jose, California, in 2008. For those who remember his presence with us, this was the GA when Bruce Reyes-Chow was elected Moderator of the denomination. (Another more familiar name is Ruth Santana-Grace, my predecessor as Executive Presbyter of San Gabriel Presbytery—Ruth is current Co-Moderator.)

The 2008 GA was marked with great conflict. While we don't have the same overt conflict nowadays, we are always at risk of creating new conflict—or going too far because those who might have given needed constraint have felt marginalized enough to be afraid to speak. But I believe that the conflict arises not out of malice but different understandings of how to follow God's direction.

Back to 2008. I was on staff of San Francisco Theological Seminary, used to set up a prayer room for every GA. At San Jose, we set up quiet spaces for people to pray and meditate, and there was a wall where people could write prayers on index cards and post. Because I dismantled the prayer wall, I ended up with the prayer cards, and it was so moving to read the prayers of so many folks:

- prayers for loved ones they had to leave at home,
- prayers for healing for friends needing peace,
- prayers of confession,
- prayers of thanksgiving,
- prayers for the openness to accept the Holy Spirit's work through the GA,
- prayers for grace for each other as they discuss challenging issues.

See the next pages for a handful of the almost 150 prayer cards that were written at that GA.

I have no doubt that this year's commissioners are just as prayerful as they begin their deliberations. So again, I ask that you pray for Deidra and Melinda and all the commissioners, advisory delegates, and all who work at GA and those who will be impacted by the decisions they make.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wendy". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter 'W' being particularly large and stylized.

Change my ♥ o Lord  
Help me to love those w/  
whom I disagree.  
Help us to love one another  
& make manifest Your  
Reign.

Father,

Hold us together as we  
struggle to discern your will.

May our conflict not interfere  
with our love for You & for each  
other or with our ability to do  
your work.

Help me live  
as your redeemed,  
beloved child.

forgive me for ...

not trusting you  
my pride  
my sinful anger  
my impatience  
my lusts of people & power  
my hurtful words and actions  
with my wife and my family

Not loving others as myself  
Not changing when you challenge me

Lord, where I am  
wrong ... correct.

Let us be  
a church  
that honors  
you.

Pear Loving God,  
May your  
heart be  
our heart.

O, God...

May we know.

May we be like your son,  
Jesus.

Spirit, transform. We need  
you.

Thank You God —  
for your grace



Thank you Holy One  
for the gift of the  
Spirit - Give us faith  
and courage to follow  
where You lead

Show me the way, & stay close,  
Lord.

I think you are calling me,  
but I am scared.