

General Assembly Report to Session

The 225th General Assembly of the PCUSA wrapped up its business on Saturday, July 9. I want to express my thanks to Session for allowing me to participate in this work of the greater church. It was, as promised, an intense, grueling, tedious, and exhausting experience. It was also encouraging, engaging, meaningful, and fulfilling. The commissioners and delegates were dedicated and focused on guiding PCUSA into a new and uncertain future. Stated Clerk Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II urged us forward and reminded us that the challenge facing the 21st century church is that we must adapt to a world that's not going to stop and wait for us.

General Assembly (GA) is a biennial gathering of commissioners and advisory delegates whose purpose is to consider proposals (overtures) submitted by presbyteries, committees, task forces, and commissions. The heavy lifting is first done in committees. I counted 18 different GA committees. Some focused on the business of the church including finances, rules of discipline, policies, and procedures. I served on the Policies and Procedures Committee. Other committees focused on the church's response to key social issues such as race and gender justice, environmental justice, immigration, and addressing violence in the USA.

The previous General Assembly (GA224) was scheduled to meet in the summer of 2020 which turned out to be the height of the COVID pandemic. They were able to meet electronically but they determined that several issues required further interaction and study and referred them to GA225. That left GA225 with a larger workload that included items that have been in the queue for years. That awareness, coupled with Rev. Dr. Nelson's urging us forward, seemed to energize the GA commissioners and advisory delegates with a desire to get things done.

The actions taken by GA225 are many. Soon we will share with the church a bulletin insert highlighting the decisions made. We will also make it available as a link on our weekly eNews for those who do not attend the onsite service. Please feel free to contact me directly if you have any questions or would like more detail about a particular action taken.

There were two items of business I want to comment on.

#1. Divestment of 5 energy companies: I learned a great deal about how PCUSA-related investment groups such as the Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Foundation, and Presbyterian Loan Investment Program decide where to invest their funds. This was of interest because this church has a significant amount of money invested with the Presbyterian Foundation's New Covenant Trust Company.

Investment decisions by these groups are guided by the belief that church investment is "an instrument of mission and includes theological, social, and economic considerations." Presbyterian Mission Agency has an Office of Faith-Based Investing and Corporate Engagement that is guided by the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI). The Committee is made up of representatives from the investment groups, the PCUSA Advocacy Committee on Women's Concerns, the PCUSA Racial Equity Advocacy Committee, the PCUSA Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, and a handful of at-large PCUSA members. MRTI is a standing committee that works hard to make sure investments reflect

PCUSA's concerns related to the pursuit of peace, racial, social, and economic justice, environmental responsibility, and securing woman's rights. MRTI staff, when possible, use these investment dollars to earn us a place at the table within corporations to advocate for these concerns.

If, after an extended period, the company refuses our overtures or isn't moving forward fast enough, MRTI will recommend divesture. Such a recommendation was brought to GA225 related to five energy companies – Chevron, ExxonMobil, Marathon Petroleum, Phillips 66, and Valero Energy. These companies have failed to meet the investment requirements and resisted attempts at engagement. GA225 approved their recommendation.

Actions taken by PCUSA have a global impact. Our investment agencies maintain relationships with other faith-based and socially conscious investment groups from around the world. Recommendations coming from MRTI (and the MRTI process) are considered to be the gold standard by the industry. Their recommendations strongly influence how other groups invest.

I am pleased to know that the funds we have invested as a church and my own personal pension funds are being used to advocate for economic, social, and environmental justice worldwide.

Item #2: Creation of an LGBTQIA+ Equity Advocacy Committee: This is a big deal and here's why. While other denominations are arguing and dividing over marriage equality and the equitable inclusion of openly LGBTQIA+ (Q+) people in the life of the church, PCUSA continues to move forward towards full inclusion of all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. (You can find PCUSA's official stance by following the link: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/sexuality-and-same-gender-relationships/>).

GA225 overwhelmingly approved the formation of an LGBTQIA+ Equity Advocacy Committee. This is more exciting than it sounds, folks. A standing committee in PCUSA moves Q+ folks from the "kids table" to a place at the "grown-ups table". Previously Q+ issues were dealt with by other standing committees such as the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns. While there is some intersection of issues, there are many that are unique to Q+ individuals that need to be addressed by the church. This standing committee will fully affirm Q+ individuals' place at the table and ensure that Q+ voices are heard by staff, ministry leaders and the church as a whole.

Again, I would be happy to answer any questions or discuss any of the issues addressed by GA225. I appreciate you allowing me this opportunity to serve the church at large.

Respectfully submitted,
Chaplain Tim Haworth
July 10, 2022