

## 225th General Assembly Report to Yellowstone Presbytery from TE Commissioner Teresa Kendall

Two years ago, General Assembly met six months into the pandemic. It was decided to do only the very basic of tasks, as we had only a rudimentary knowledge of the technology needed. Every Assembly means intense, long days and by 2022 the tech crew had learned a lot, so we tackled four years of decisions about being church, and being church in these times - taking some bold steps (not just words) toward responding to the climate emergency, gun violence, immigration, reproductive justice, international relationships, and racial justice. Many found our time together overwhelming - both because of the tech and the issues. Many also found it hopeful in the midst of lament as “Lament to Hope” was the theme chosen by the 2020 General Assembly Co-Moderators.

The seven “Rs” of moving from Lament to Hope (shared by the 224th GA Co-Moderators) shaped our worship and many of the overtures brought to the 225th General Assembly this year.

REMEMBRANCE: of the truth, particularly of genocide and slavery  
(the 2020 Co-Moderators were of African and Indigenous descent)

REMORSE: saying “I’m sorry”

REPENT: turning around

REPAIR: doing something to repair the situation

RECONCILIATION: repairing relationships

RESURRECTION: watching what God will do!

REJOICE: in what God has done!

I would say this 225th General Assembly had a bold, active feel to it, some of which was a response to so little action taken at the General Assembly in 2020, and some of it responding to the issues facing our society. We elected co-moderators Rev Ruth Santana-Grace and Rev Shavon Starling-Louis. Their theme for 2022-2024 is “Unbounded We Thrive.” We also re-elected Rev Dr Diane Moffett as president and executive director of Presbyterian Mission Agency. We heard a “state of the union” address from our Stated Clerk Rev Dr J Herbert Nelson, II on themes of innovation, resurrection, daring to go into the places no one else wants to go, and being faithful to Jesus Christ.

If you buy “The Montana Standard” newspaper (Butte) on Sunday, you may have read the July 17, 2022 article on pre-natal care on the Reservations - or rather, the lack thereof. Black women in particular also experience challenges getting pre-and post-natal health care. The Presbyterian church, at this General Assembly said, “this must change” with Reproductive Justice education, resources, and advocacy. Reproductive Justice addresses the issues and causes of the higher rate of infant mortality and disrespect in the medical care of women of color.

Assistance is needed for immigrants, especially those seeking to become citizens of the US. The term used at this General Assembly is “Accompaniment.” We, as a whole church, will walk with folks as they try to navigate services available to them and through our court system; as they try to apply for a driver’s license. Many immigrants need legal services - so Presbyterian lawyers, especially retired ones, are encouraged to learn immigration law and offer their knowledge and expertise.

This Assembly believes that it has walked the fine line between confirming the existence of the state of Israel and the declaration that the Israeli government is fulfilling the definition of apartheid, especially towards Palestinian people. For those of you with relationships with Jews, it's important to note that this criticism is not toward Jewish people (which is anti-semitism) or the right of Israel to exist.

This Assembly supported our Mission Agency in offering various helpful resources to churches. A few are as follows: supporting the Guns to Gardens project which receives guns from those who no longer wish to have them and turns them into garden tools; creating the Center of Repair of Historical Harm as a way to respond to our individual church's history of slavery and genocide; and offering an apology (appropriate for worship) "for the sin of slavery and its legacy."

For the first time, at this General Assembly, we had two committee moderators whose first language was not English and GA co-moderators who could speak fluently in a second language. Since 2018, our church has made available Global Language Resources to the whole church. This group provided translation services at General Assembly Committee meetings and the main Assembly meetings in Spanish, Korean, and English.

General Assembly requires a lot of time for commissioners - this one especially so - to participate in both on-line and in-person meetings. There were the long days of plenary meetings; on-line training on how to use the on-line overture and voting system, and how to be the best commissioner you can be; there were lots of overtures to read; and travel details to arrange for the in-person committee meetings.

The General Assembly, made up of at least one Ruling Elder and one Minister from each of the 166 Presbyteries in the United States and Puerto Rico, did some significant work that affects the Church. GA changed the age requirements for Young Adult Advisory Delegates to 18-23 years of age.

One of the four biggest decisions was to propose a complete overhaul of our Rules of Discipline, to be called Church Discipline. One of the marks of the true church in the Reformed Tradition is "Church discipline uprightly ministered" so this isn't "fluff" work - it's important. With changes in technology and the desire to continue to lift up reconciliation and justice over punishment, this committee worked for a number of years in giving us this new section of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Book of Order. Each Presbytery will vote on whether to accept this new piece of work and it will need only a majority to pass.

A second big decision was to create a commission (with power to make change happen) to unify the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly. It has been confusing for many, not just myself, how these two agencies at the top level of our denomination are funded and their separate responsibilities. This is scary and important work as it will have implications for the Church's vision and purpose, and will impact a number people's jobs.

Presbyteries have been very challenged lately regarding their Per Capita payments. We voted for a team to take the information gathered from visits with Presbytery leadership and develop experiments in how to fund the work and relationships we have across the PC(USA). In the mean time, we have a significant raise in General Assembly Per Capita for 2023 and then a small reduction in 2024.

A third big decision was to create a commission to write a new Confession for our Book of Confessions. This can be a decades-long process. I personally would not have put

my money and time on this, but it is important for many others that we do this, “for a time such as this.”

A fourth big decision was to form a task force regarding Ruling Elders. Ruling Elders are equal to ministers when votes are taken, but they have different gifts and training. Many churches, including a number of churches in Yellowstone Presbytery, can’t afford an installed pastor, but are open to the leadership of a Commissioned Ruling Elder. This task force will prepare a response to the question: What is the role of Ruling Elders in the Church, especially in teaching, preaching, administering the sacraments, and pastoral care in the church? Our own experiments, including the recent commissioning of Ruling Elder Chuck Wright, will inform the work of this task force.

General Assembly, as usual, referred a number of things to Presbyteries for their votes that will affect individual churches. (A side note on Presbyterian government. Decisions TO the General Assembly come from church sessions through Presbyteries, and also standing committees of the larger church. Decisions made AT General Assembly that change the Book of Order - effecting individual churches - must be affirmed by a majority of the 166 Presbyteries before they are enacted.) One thing up for Presbytery vote is requiring each church to include twelve weeks of family leave in their Terms of Calls for installed pastors. Yellowstone Presbytery is already including this in our Terms of Call with new pastors to our presbytery, so we’re a little ahead of the game on this one.

As we each think about the mission of our congregations - what we do and how we partner with our community - the church has been given two important questions to consider, “Who have we NOT heard from as we make plans?” and “Who will this decision impact?”

A highlight for me was the Guiding Statement for the PC(USA) from the Moving Forward Committee. It was something I could easily grasp, inform my preaching and goal setting, and would be helpful at session meetings with the question, “How are we doing?”

We are the PC(USA):

We are Prayerful  
We are Courageous  
We are United  
We are Serving  
We are Alive

Thank you for your confidence in electing me as the Teaching Elder Commissioner from Yellowstone Presbytery to the 225th General Assembly (2022). It was an honor to do this work with so many dedicated, caring people who love this church and desire to be faithful to our calling to serve Jesus Christ in the world.

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