

Welcome to the 220th General Assembly



June 30 — July 7, 2012, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The Moderator's Column**A Helping Hand to Commissioners and Advisory Delegates****By Bill Dummer**

On behalf of the coordinating team of Presbyterian Voices for Justice, I offer congratulations on your election as a commissioner or advisory delegate to the 220th (2012) General Assembly of the PCUSA.

This year there are some new issues, as well as some variations on those from past assemblies. Presbyterian Voices for Justice (carrying on the mission of the Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia) will be there to welcome you and do our best to help you work your way through those issues that we consider to have justice implications. I recall my take on one of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr's books during my seminary years. Just about the time you think you have done something to bring the reign of God closer, something else pops up that needs to be addressed. This year's GA will be no different.

Members of the PV4J team will be available at some of the committees to testify during the hearings, as well as help with understanding the issues that are being discussed. Just look for our rectangular Presbyterian Voices for Justice buttons. If you need help with strategy on an issue, please feel free to talk with us. We will also be glad to discuss issues at our booth in the Exhibit Hall.

We hope you will purchase tickets to the three events that we sponsor:

1. the biennial Awards Luncheon, Sunday, July 1, at East Liberty Presbyterian Church, with featured speaker J. Herbert Nelson II, Director of Public Witness for the PCUSA.
2. the Voices of Sophia Breakfast, Tuesday, July 3, at the Westin Convention Center. Sylvia Thorson-Smith, longtime activist in the church on behalf of women's and sexuality issues will be speaking about the historic 1993 Re-Imagining Conference and what it can teach us about our hopes and work for the future.
3. the famous Witherspoon Society Dance Party, Tuesday evening, July 3, at the Omni Hotel. Since this is the only free evening commissioners will have before beginning plenary session deliberations, you will want to toss your cares aside and kick up your heels ☺.

I encourage you to take time to read through this issue of Network News as part of your preparation for General Assembly. We look forward to seeing you in Pittsburgh!

Join Us Today!

Please return this form with your membership dues – or you can join online and pay by credit card, at <http://www.pv4j.org/join-us.html>

Membership dues (includes newsletter)

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 \$110 for 2 years
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 \$10 students
 ONE YEAR FREE for 2012 YAADs/TSADs
 I'm adding \$_____ as my extra contribution for the work of Presbyterian Voices for Justice

**Please make your check payable to
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 1 Medinah Court, Greensburg, PA 15601**

Name(s) _____

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Presbytery: _____

Welcome to General Assembly!

Information Gleaned Over the Years That
We Hope Is Helpful

The leadership team of **Presbyterian Voices for Justice** congratulates you on your election as a commissioner or advisory delegate to this year's General Assembly. Once again, this will be an exciting time for everyone in the Presbyterian Church.

At some point you may begin to feel that you are receiving too much mail about the General Assembly. We hope that this issue of our periodical, *Network News*, will help you understand some potentially confusing aspects of the Assembly and enable you to participate more effectively. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions.

HOW ARE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES FORMED?

A computer has assigned you to an Assembly committee by random selection. In preparing for the Assembly you will want to read the reports and materials assigned to your committee. We hope, however, that you don't focus on these to the exclusion of the other materials mailed or e-mailed to you, since you will eventually vote on **all** the matters that come to the Assembly floor.

WHO COMES TO G.A. — AND WHY?

The cast of characters for the General Assembly drama consists of (1) commissioners and advisory delegates; (2) staff and elected members of the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC), its

committees and divisions, and Special Committees; (3) "camp followers"; and (4) affinity groups.

1. Commissioners have the power to speak and vote, both on the floor and in the committees. The committees debate overtures and reports assigned to them, then recommend action to the entire Assembly. The pace can be fast and furious, and it's easy to feel lost amid the maneuvering. Commissioners are not to be "instructed" by their presbyteries on how to vote. But they are often subjected to arguments as various sides vie for their votes.

Sitting with the commissioners are **Young Adult Advisory Delegates** (YAADs) elected from the presbyteries, and **Theological Seminary Advisory Delegates** (TSADs) elected from the seminaries, as well as **Ecumenical** and **Missionary Advisory Delegates** from abroad. In committees, advisory delegates have the right to speak, and usually to vote. On the floor of the Assembly, they have the right to speak; their vote, which is taken first, is advisory to the Commissioners.

Corresponding members come from the elected or appointed membership of the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC), its committees and divisions, the Special Committees, other churches in communion with the PC(USA), and moderators of past Assemblies. They are seated on the floor and may speak to matters related to their areas of expertise, but they may not vote. Moderators of earlier General Assemblies do not speak frequently; but when they do, they can be very important to the course of the debate. (They are not "former" or

"retired"; each remains Moderator of a General Assembly with its own number.)

2. Staff and elected members of the GAMC, its Committees and Divisions, and Special Committees are those who implement the policies of the General Assemblies, year in and year out. The ongoing activity of the PC(USA) and its national staff is governed by these various boards, agencies, and committees whose members are elected by successive Assemblies — more than 200 positions each time. The General Assembly Nominating Committee (GANC) carefully vets those who are nominated, with attention to diversity — geographic, gender, race/ethnicity, age, proportion of ministers and elders. Nominations can be made from the floor; most years some alternative candidates are proposed, but the GANC's recommendations are usually followed.

Staff members are our "institutional memory." You'll recognize them by their red name badges. They can tell you what has been done, indicate pitfalls, and define alternatives. They have accumulated wisdom and savvy from previous Assemblies and are valuable sources of information and ideas. They work for the whole church (including you), so feel free to consult them. GA Staff do not make policy. The "advice and counsel" papers that you will receive, commenting on various business items before the Assembly, have been approved by the various committees, all of them made up of people elected by past General Assemblies.

3. "Camp followers" are those who are "just visiting" or observing. Many accompany the Assembly year after year as it moves around the country (you yourself

could find the Assembly addicting!). The "camp followers" add a family flavor to the Assembly. They fall into three general types: (a) **pastors and church staff**, who are trying to understand the church better (the Assembly is our denomination in its national and in fact international role, and there's no substitute for experiencing it firsthand); (b) **people who attended GA in the past and got hooked on it**; and (c) **spouses and friends of commissioners**, who occupy the gallery seats and provide spontaneous responses to speakers they know (their responses aren't always reflected in the voting of the commissioners).

Then there's another important group, although they aren't just visiting. They are the **local folk**, proud to have an Assembly in their region and now acting as gracious hosts. They are with the **Committee on Local Arrangements** and should be thanked lavishly and often. Without their many hours of loving labor, the Assembly wouldn't happen.

4. "Affinity" or "special purpose" organizations are not new to the scene. The concept dates back to 1902. **The Witherspoon Society** joined the list in 1973 as advocates for peace, justice, the integrity of creation, and inclusiveness in church and society. **Voices of Sophia** was organized in 1995 to advocate for women's issues and feminist theological values. **Presbyterian Voices for Justice** was created in 2008 as a merger of WS and VOS; we have a broad concern for all social justice issues, and we promote a fully inclusive, egalitarian community of faith. Affinity groups help to inform and educate commissioners and advisory delegates. They often testify before Assembly committees. They try to

influence the decision-making process according to their various purposes. Consequently some people perceive them as a threat rather than a resource. They can be both, depending on your point of view — and the methods they use. It is important to remember that these organizations are made up of **Presbyterians**; they are **insiders, not outsiders**. They manifest the church's pluralism and diversity. However, they are observers on the committee and plenary process; they are only allowed to speak at the will of the body.

To follow Assembly business as reported by Presbyterian Voices for Justice, go to our website: www.pv4j.org.

If you go to the booths of affinity groups with your commissioner badge, you will get a royal welcome and receive lots of information on their issues. Many of the booths will also have gifts, buttons, and other items. Special purpose organizations are interested in working with you to give "background" or help draft motions. We hope you will have many positive contacts with these organizations during this year's GA. Most, including **Presbyterian Voices for Justice**, have **rented booths** in the Exhibition Hall, where they welcome inquiries from you. We think you will find these exhibits some of the most informative and lively at the GA. **Come and see us in Booth #210!**

HOW IN THE WORLD DOES ALL THIS WORK?

The drama of the Assembly has several acts. The avalanche of the printed (or now electronic) word hits even before you leave home. The **Manual of the General Assembly** serves as the bible for those who

want to know procedures. The **Reports to the 220th General Assembly (2012)** will be sent to you in multiple parts. When you arrive you will be given a **Worship Book**, which contains the services for the Assembly, and an updated **program book** for the Assembly, which contains seating charts, locations of meeting rooms, detailed dockets, the list of commissioners and advisory delegates, and other helpful information. The final deluge of paper or electronic information comes in the form of reports distributed to your seat (or laptop) in the Convention Hall, starting even before you sit down. It is a dearly beloved GA tradition to complain about the blizzard of paper (or of digitized data) you are expected to weather. Complaining about it — or reading it — may help to pass the time during the play's boring moments. Consider this part of the much-loved GA initiation process ☺. When it's over, you too will join the ranks of proud GA survivors!

The curtain will rise on Saturday afternoon. After various housekeeping actions there will be reports, some of which may cause wailing and gnashing of teeth over budgets and membership numbers.

Act I takes place on Saturday evening with the excitement of a political convention. Candidates for Moderator are nominated with speeches; commissioners get a chance to question the nominees, then the voting takes place. When there are more than two candidates, voting can go into a second or third ballot (all candidates remain on the ballot). The newly elected Moderator leads the Assembly in prayer and takes office immediately following the election, then appoints the Vice-Moderator.

Act II consists of several days of Assembly committee meetings. Each committee has a moderator and a vice-moderator, as well as an assistant from the office of the Stated Clerk to help the process flow smoothly.

Your committee will receive reports from the relevant agencies, which may also present draft policy statements that were called for by previous Assemblies. Pay careful attention to their reports and especially the "background" information they supply; there's usually a good reason for dealing with these topics, and the reports have been prepared with the help of other Presbyterians who are knowledgeable about the issues.

Other proposals will come in the form of overtures from presbyteries. And you can introduce new business through a Commissioners' Resolution signed by two or more commissioners. A deadline will be announced (probably on Sunday). Recently the Office of the General Assembly has required the commissioners to appear personally and sign the document.

Some committees will hold open hearings on particular overtures, reports, and resolutions. Sign-up sheets to testify at these hearings are usually posted on Saturday and are located near the Registration area in the convention hall. You can sign up to testify on issues that aren't being addressed in your committee, but you need to be sure that the times don't conflict with your own committee schedule. Occasionally, commissioners leave their own committees for a short time to testify elsewhere.

You may feel impatient with the amount of material you are expected to read, and then

ask how the Assembly could ever make judgments about so many issues. Listen to the testimony from those who have worked on the studies — and to those who have signed up for the open hearings.

Assembly committees have more options than simply to approve or disapprove, even though that might be your first instinct when you arrive as a green commissioner. They may **amend** any document before them, or **approve with comment**, or **combine** wording, or **substitute** completely new wording of their own, or **refer** to a GA entity or a future Assembly. Please don't start off with a motion to disapprove; that will only create confusion and block fair discussion. If that happens, raise an objection and offer a substitute motion to approve, so that the issues are discussed fairly.

The committee can set its own operating rules and change the agenda drafted by its moderator; it can appoint drafting committees to develop more satisfactory wording; it can break up into sub-committees to examine documents more thoroughly; it can go into the "committee of the whole" mode and discuss issues without the straitjacket of Robert's Rules of Order, giving "air time" to all members of the committee; it can ask to hear from representatives of diverse viewpoints before undertaking its own discussion of complex issues.

In the course of many General Assemblies, Sylvia Thorson-Smith of Tucson, Arizona, (member of the PV4J leadership team) has given briefings to commissioners on how to make their best contribution to committee work. Her observations are the result of watching many GA committees, with

particular attention to power dynamics and the advancement of justice issues. Here's her "tip sheet" that has been distributed at many GAs:

Sylvia's Top Ten Tips

Questions to Ask Yourself While Participating in a GA Committee

1. Who is speaking and who isn't?
2. Who is moving their agenda and how are they doing it?
3. Is the will of the committee being served?
4. Who needs enabling or helpful support?
5. Whose interests are being served through the "parliamentary mode" and the "committee of the whole"?

Things to Do on Behalf Justice for ALL Voices in your Committee

1. Be attentive to process as well as content.
2. Don't give up your voice.
3. Identify allies and support each other.
4. Take risks on behalf of love and justice.
5. Make the connections between interlocking issues.

In 2012, we tend to think that women and men participate in similar ways in committee deliberations. After all, the Women's Movement is almost 50 years old! However, repeatedly observers who keep count of "movers and shakers" (those who speak and direct the action the most) in committees find a three-to-one male-female ratio of participation. Males, many of them ministers, have an abundance of insider knowledge and experience; but they need to make a special effort to listen for other voices, too. You will be much

admired if you try to see that the process is fair and that some of the quieter members (women, non-whites, advisory delegates) are encouraged to share their ideas. You can always speak to the committee moderator if you have concerns about the fairness of procedures for recognizing commissioners in a clear and orderly fashion that promotes a thorough discussion by everyone.

Remember that some persons are authorized to take part in the committee's discussions, while others are not (see the ***Manual of the General Assembly***). Members of the GAMC and staff members of its committees and divisions may comment at any time. Representatives of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution may comment on issues of constitutionality, in an "advisory" capacity. You also have the right to ask for information and perspectives from the "advocacy" committees on social witness policy, and on women's and racial ethnic concerns.

Other persons have access only through (1) signing up for hearings before the deadline (usually Sunday night), or (2) being invited, by vote of the committee, to represent viewpoints that might not otherwise be heard. Either way, it is important to hear all sides of a complex issue. The procedures are intended to help the committee's deliberative process; they should not be allowed to become a filibustering session for one point of view.

The committee will want to arrive at agreement on most issues, and this is often possible. But you and other committee members have the right to prepare a ***minority report*** (or even ***more than one***) on any report that comes to the floor. If you

take this route, be sure that (1) you declare your intention before the committee adjourns, (2) all the points in your minority report have been raised in committee discussion, and (3) the committee moderator certifies in writing that this is so. Minority reports will be printed and distributed to the commissioners, and they will be discussed along with the majority report in the plenary session of the Assembly. A minority report is sometimes victorious on the Assembly floor; even more often it makes a difference to the discussion and the eventual outcome. So don't be afraid to prepare one and argue for it if you think the majority's perspective is mistaken or too narrow.

Our Presbyterian tradition values the free flow of information, so Assembly committees are open to observers except on rare occasions (usually not on Sunday nights when members of each committee are getting to know each other). As a commissioner you may want to speak to an issue before a committee other than your own, and you can do that *if* you sign up before the deadline *and* get permission from your committee to be absent from its deliberations. And please note that *any* commissioner or advisory delegate may speak to *any* issue when a committee's moderator makes its report on the floor of the Assembly.

Don't be alarmed if there is open conflict in your committee; it's a sign of deeply held convictions. Usually the most constructive discussion comes in the committee's deliberations. At times, however, a constructive role can be played in the "backstage" areas where drafts are written and revised or minority reports are prepared. Committees can be the scene of

tears and laughter as a result of sympathy, anger, relief, frustration, and other expressions of emotion. Often this sharing can bring committee members together in beautifully healing and constructive ways.

Some committees with light work loads will conclude their business early; others, like the Laborers in the Vineyard, bear the full heat of the day (including the klieg lights of the news media) and continue late into the night. The Bills and Overtures committee doesn't finish its work until GA is over; it can be called off the Assembly floor and into session at any time.

Let's hope your committee's schedule gives you time to explore the Exhibition Hall, where you will find a veritable cornucopia of Presbyterianism. Virtually every organization in the church is represented — not to mention a bookstore and an international shop with clothing, jewelry, arts and crafts, and miscellaneous goodies offered by SERRV International. This is your best opportunity to experience the breadth, depth, and height of the Presbyterian Church. Many organizations not only have booths but special breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and other events; commissioners and visitors will find themselves informed, inspired, and renewed by these events.

WHAT EVENTS IS PRESBYTERIAN VOICES FOR JUSTICE SPONSORING?

The Biennial Awards Luncheon following Sunday worship. This will be held following the Sunday morning worship service at East Liberty Presbyterian Church. Featured speaker at the Awards Luncheon this year will be J. Herbert Nelson, director of Public Witness in the Washington Office of the PC(USA).

Our Andrew Murray Award will be also be presented to Dorothea Murray, widow of Andrew, for whom this award to justice-seekers was originally named. Tickets (\$21) can be ordered through the General Assembly ticket service. There will be buses to take people to local churches.

The Voices of Sophia Breakfast, Tuesday, July 3, 7 a.m., Westin Hotel Convention Center. Sylvia Thorson-Smith, elder, St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, Tucson, AZ and member of the PV4J leadership team will be the featured speaker. Her topic will be **Re-Imagining "Re-Imagining" and the Next 20 Years.** Sylvia was a founding member of Voices of Sophia in 1995 and taught sociology, gender, and religious studies at Grinnell College for 17 years. Her topic is inspired by an event that shook the PC(USA) in 1993, a gathering that thrilled the 2,200 women and men who attended and horrified others. "Re-Imagining" featured women theologians from across the globe and created an ecumenical community that celebrated liturgies, music, and art by women. As a feminist activist who attended the first and subsequent "Re-Imaginings" for 10 years, Sylvia will examine why the church came to the brink of schism over this extraordinary gathering and explore how "Re-Imagining" – then and now – can instruct our witness to the Gospel in the upcoming decades.

On Tuesday evening you have the chance to take a break, catch up with friends, enjoy great music, converse informally, and kick up your heels at the famous **Witherspoon Party and Dance.** This will be held in the Omni William Penn Hotel; tickets are \$20 through the GA ticket office or at the door. Please note that alcoholic beverages are out of bounds for minors.

ACT III begins as the Assembly returns to plenary session on Wednesday morning. Just when you have begun to feel like an expert on your own committee's business, you will now have to catch up with recommendations from all the other committees and learn the arguments pro and con. Usually the issues will be presented clearly by the committee moderator and in minority reports. But you and others may well have new angles. Be prepared to speak, either by raising a question of information or by arguing for or against a motion. Depending on the progress of business, Friday night could be a long session.

The curtain comes down at noon on Saturday. This is one show that never runs late; all the work must be completed or referred by that time. This sometimes makes for less-than-careful consideration and less-than-optimal results. But such is the nature of our play.

You may want to compare your experience at this year's Assembly with the following observations based on past experience:

1. Most committee recommendations will be approved, perhaps with heated debate on some one aspect, or with amendments that are readily agreed to.
2. Many of the anticipated plenary debates don't ever materialize, possibly because (a) the committee did its work well and ironed out the kinks; (b) an agreement was hammered out in the halls; or (c) time and patience ran out. On the other hand, unanticipated debates do occur, sometimes with explosive intensity, derailing the docket and stopping the whole show. Debate is usually accompanied by

parliamentary maneuvering. The skill and charm of the Moderator and the "parliamentary calls" by the Stated Clerk are key factors in determining whether things can be kept on track with minimal tension.

3. Although the Spirit often leads commissioners to vote more boldly than they had anticipated, the Assembly can also lose its nerve. Overcome by exhaustion or fatigued by a divisive vote, it may decree, "No faith-risk this year," or, "No more funds," or, "We just don't want to hear any more about it." As a result the Assembly may miss a liberating moment.

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIALS FOR ACTION ON THE G.A. STAGE?

Information is available in such massive quantities that ***shared labor, specialization, and trust*** are essential. The Assembly simply hasn't the time to act as a committee of the whole (on occasion it does try); the major work is done in the committees, with the Assembly acting as arbiter. Up-to-date, accurate information is one key to being an effective commissioner or advisory delegate (this may also be difficult to obtain, especially while the committees are in session). Feel free to ask for help from your own committee's resource people. They are there to serve you and facilitate the work of the Assembly. Listen, read carefully, ask questions, and take time to reflect and pray. The ability to concentrate and maintain patience for long hours with little sleep is essential for being an effective commissioner or advisory delegate. So, too, are camaraderie, a sense of humor, and help from friends and allies. We hope you will number **Presbyterian Voices for Justice** among your Assembly friends.

The General Assembly is a unique experience, one you will always remember. It's important to remember that you and the other commissioners are doing what we all believe is the work of Christ's church. Keep the Assembly in your prayers as you prepare for your participation as well as during the time you're in Pittsburgh.

We hope this experience will serve to deepen your faith in God and your commitment to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We also hope that through its decision-making, this Assembly will dare to proclaim "the acceptable year of God" – preaching "good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty for the oppressed." May God bless you as you begin your important work as a commissioner or advisory delegate to the 220th General Assembly.

Buttons, Buttons, We've got the buttons!



General Assembly Exhibit Hall Booth #210

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WHO ARE WE?**The mission of Presbyterian Voices for Justice**

We are a playful and passionate community of women and men in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who are called to proclaim the Gospel vision of God's extravagant love and justice in church and society.

We seek the wisdom of the Spirit for following Christ's example and for living into the hope of sustained gender equality, racial reconciliation, full human rights for LGBT persons, economic justice, environmental wholeness, an end to war and all forms of violence, and a justice-loving shalom over all the earth.

We commit to risking the transformation of our own selves and our organization to live into this vision, even as we invite both church and society to meet this challenge.

What's the Buzz – on GA Issues of Interest to Justice-Lovers?

By Sylvia Thorson-Smith
PV4J Issues Coordinator

Once again, the time is upon us to prepare for PCUSA consideration of a wide range of business that is coming to its biennial General Assembly. As members of the Presbyterian wing of Christ's Church and the leadership team of Presbyterian Voices for Justice, we approach this task with a pronounced concern for those issues which have implications for the way that Presbyterians do justice. Micah 6:8 sums up our mandate to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. In biblical understanding, justice-making is our mission to establish right-relationship – conditions of equality, harmony, and mutuality – in the whole of humankind and the earth.

As we, members of the coordinating team of PV4J, assess the many pieces of this year's business, we are grateful for the work that is done by many groups that also approach issues with an eye toward our church's calling to "do justice." In particular, the PCUSA has directed the Advisory Council on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC), and the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) to provide Advice and Counsel (in the form of A&C papers) on all items before the Assembly that have justice implications. In addition to these three groups, the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association (PHEWA) is a network of social welfare and justice ministries. You will learn more about the work of these four denominational groups at GA, but we want to provide you with some of their preliminary interest and recommendations regarding GA business.

Advisory Council on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)

ACSWP is providing the following Advice and Council on:

- Item 04-01** – Biennial Assemblies Report – **approve with amendments**
- Item 05-12** – Mid Council Report to the Assembly – **disapprove**
- Items 06-08, 06-13, and 06-17** – changes to the *Book of Order* – **disapprove**
- Items 07-01 and 07-12** – amending *Book of Order* G-2.0104b – **disapprove**
- Items 07-02, 07-03, 07-06, and 07-16** – ordination standards – **disapprove**
- Item 07-08** – ordination, Scripture and the confessions – **disapprove**
- Items 07-09 and 07-13** – ordination examinations – **disapprove**
- Items 07-10 and 07-11** – the refusal of ordination – **disapprove**
- Items 07-17 and 07-18** – committed, same-gender relationships – **disapprove**
- Item 10-01** – recognizing Bloomfield College as a racial ethnic college -- **disapprove**
- Item 10-04** – the housing and mortgage crisis – **approve with amendments**
- Item 10-05** – special offerings – **approve with an amendment**
- Item 10-06** – Peacemaking Offering – **the counsel provides a rationale for the Assembly to consider**
- Item 10-13** – Report on the Nature of the Church – **approve**
- Item 11-01** – economic justice – **approve with an amendment**
- Item 11-02** – fair development and treatment of workers – **approve**
- Item 11-03** – "Fifty Year Farm Bill" – **approve with an amendment**

- Item 11-05** – corporal punishment – **approve with amendments**
Item 11-06 – on for-profit prisons – **approve with amendments**
Item 11-07 – support for the Environmental Protection Agency – **approve with amendments**
Item 11-09 – World of Hurt, Word of Life – **(from ACSWP)**
Item 12-01 – rescinding a GA action in support of immigrant rights – **disapprove**
Item 12-02 – the plight of immigrants – **answer this item with the action on item 12-03**
Item 12-03 – the plight of immigrants – **approve with amendments**
Item 12-04 – comprehensive immigration reform – **approve with amendments**
Item 12-05 – the plight of Christian Indonesian immigrants – **approve**
Item 12-06 – immigration – **answer this item with the action on Item 12-04**
Item 12-07 – churches in relationship with immigrant communities – **approve**
Items 13-01, 13-04, 13-06, AND 13-11 -- marriage – **the counsel provides a rationale for the Assembly to consider**
Items 13-02, 13-03, 13-05, 13-08, 13-09, AND 13-10 – Authoritative Interpretation regarding same-gender marriage – **the counsel provides a rationale for the Assembly to consider**
Items 13-07, 13-12, AND 13-13 – definition of marriage – **disapprove**
Item 14-01 – supporting the United Nations -- **concurrence with ACWC's A&C**
Item 14-02 – support for people of the Congo – **approve**
Item 14-03 – On Human Rights and Civic Freedoms – **(from ACSWP)**
Item 14-04 – Human Rights Update – **(from ACSWP)**
Item 14-05 – Encountering the Gospel of Peace Anew – **(from ACSWP)**
Item 15-01 – Israel's practices toward Palestine – **approve an alternate resolution**
Item 15-02 – boycotting Israeli products – **approve with amendments**
Items 15-03 and 15-08 – divestment – **approve with amendments**
Item 15-04 – US-Iran relations – **approve with amendments**
Items 15-05 and 15-07 – boycotts and divestment – **disapprove**
Item 15-07 – boycotts and divestment -- **disapprove with Items 15-05 and 15-10**
Item 15-09 – human rights for Palestinians – **approve with amendments**
Item 15-10 – creative actions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – **disapprove**
Item 20-01 – the Board of Pensions and same-gender partners – **disapprove**
Item 20-02 – denial of medical benefits for abortions – **disapprove**
Item 20-03 – disability benefits – **approve with amendments**
Item 21-01 – practices of health insurance companies – **adopt an alternative resolution**
Item 21-02 – inclusion of people with disabilities – **approve**
Item 21-03 – the just access to reproductive health care – **approve with an amendment**

Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC)

ACREC is giving the following Advice and Council on:

- Item 03-13** – flexible presbytery boundaries – **disapprove**
Item 05-01 – creating a committee on synod boundaries – **approve**
Item 05-05 – freedom of conscience for congregations – **disapprove**
Item 05-08 – flexibility in presbyteries relating – **disapprove**

- Item 05-09** – extending Mid-Council Commission – **disapprove**
Item 05-10 – delaying actions creating non-geographic presbyteries -- **approve**
Item 05-12 – Mid Council Report to the Assembly – **disapprove recommendations 1-7 and approve recommendation 8 as amended**
Item 06-08 – unity in diversity – **disapprove**
Item 06-13 – eliminate list of those whom we refuse to discriminate against – **disapprove**
Item 06-17 – unity in diversity and election of elders/deacons – **disapprove**
Item 07-07 – reevaluating ordination exams – **approve**
Item 10-01 – recognizing Bloomfield College as a racial ethnic college – **disapprove**
Item 10-02 – instituting special offering for Native American ministry – **approve**
Item 10-04 – statement on housing and mortgage crisis – **approve**
Item 10-12 – ACREC name change – **from ACREC)**
Item 10-13 – Nature of the Church report – **approve as amended**
Item 10-14 – Special Offerings report – **disapprove**
Item 10-15 – Status of Women report – **approve**
Item 10-16 – Women of Color Consultation report – **disapprove**
Item 10-17 – Hispanic/Latino/a Leadership Conversation Group – **approve as amended**
Item 11-01 – economic justice – **approve**
Item 11-02 – end to poverty zone development – **approve**
Item 11-04 – strengthening connections with racial ethnic churches – **approve**
Item 11-06 – MRTI and for-profit prisons – **approve**
Item 11-08 – resolution on racism, incarceration, and restoration – **(from ACREC)**
Item 11-09 – World of Hurt, Word of Life – **approve**
Item 11-10 – workers’ rights and income inequality – **(from ACREC)**
Item 11-11 – recognizing the call to prophetic witness – **(from ACREC)**
Item 11-17 – Climate for Change report – **approve**
Item 12-01 – rescinding 219th GA’s action – **disapprove**
Items 12-02, 12-03, 12-05, 12-06, 12-07, and 12-08 – immigration issues – **approve**
Item 12-09 – commitment of PCUSA to just immigration policy – **(from ACREC)**
Item 15-01 – recognizing Israel’s practice of apartheid – **approve**
Item 15-02 – boycotting Ahava, etc. – **approve as amended**
Item 15-03 – divestment from Caterpillar – **approve**
Item 15-05 – ethical investment and divestment – **disapprove**
Item 15-06 – Palestinian Christians and economic solidarity – **approve**
Item 15-07 – rejecting unse of BDS policies – **disapprove**
Item 15-08 – selective divestment – **approve**
Item 15-09 – human rights of Arab and Palestinian citizens – **approve**
Item 15-10 – creative course re: Palestinian-Israeli conflict – **disapprove**
Item 15-11 – MRTI report – **approve**
Item 16-03 – African American Church Growth Strategy report – **approve as amended**
Item 16-06 -- Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Church Growth – **approve as amended**
Item 17-01 – parenting initiative – **disapprove**
Item 18-01 – include Belhar in *Book of Confessions* – **approve**
Item 21-01 – MRTI and health insurance companies – **approve**
Item 21-02 – policy on inclusion of people with disabilities -- **approve**

Advocacy Committee for Women (ACWC)

ACWC is giving the following Advice and Council on:

- Item 06-03** – administrative leave – **disapprove**
- Item 06-08** – unity in diversity – **disapprove**
- Item 06-17** – unity in diversity and election of elders/deacons – **disapprove**
- Item 07-02** – standards for ordination – **disapprove**
- Item 07-08** – behavioral expectations – **disapprove**
- Item 07-10** – freedom of conscience – **disapprove**
- Item 07-11** – freedom of conscience for councils – **disapprove**
- Item 07-17** – honoring Christ in our relationships – **disapprove**
- Item 10-15** – Status of Women Report – **approve**
- Item 10-16** – Women of Color Consultation Report – **disapprove**
- Item 11-01** – economic justice – **approve**
- Items 11-12, 11-13, 11-14, 11-15, 11-16, 11-18** (all from ACWC)
- Item 13-02 [13-05, 13-07, 13-12, 13-08]** – authoritative interpretation of W-4.9000 – **disapprove**
- Item 13-09 [13-03, 13-10]** – authoritative interpretation of W-4.9000 – **approve**
- Item 13-11 [13-01, 13-04, 13-06]** – amending W-4.9000 regarding marriage – **approve**
- Item 14-01** – supporting the United Nations – **approve**
- Item 14-02** – support for the people of the Congo – **approve**
- Item 15-04** – US-Iran relations – **approve**
- Item 20-01** – benefits for same-gender partners – **disapprove**
- Item 20-02** – denial of medical benefits for abortions – **disapprove**
- Item 20-11** – freedom of conscience re: benefits plan -- **disapprove**
- Item 21-01** – MRTI and health insurance companies -- **approve**
- Item 21-02** – policy on inclusion of people with disabilities -- **approve**
- Item 21-03** – just access to reproductive health care – **approve**

Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association (PHEWA)

Of particular interest to PHEWA are the following:

- Item 11-06** – on corporate policies of for-profit prisons
- Item 11-08** – on racism, incarceration, and restitution
- Items 12-03 and 04** – on immigrants and immigration Reform
- Item 14-04** – Human Rights Update
- Item 20-02** – on directing the Board of Pensions regarding payment for abortions
- Item 21-01** – on the practices of health insurance companies
- Item 21-02** – on inclusion of people with disabilities
- Item 21-03** – on providing just access to reproductive health care

* * * * *

In addition to supporting the justice work of official bodies of the PCUSA, PV4J works in partnership with affinity groups who have concern for particular justice issues. More Light Presbyterians seeks the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith in the church. The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship takes action to reduce violence in the world and promotes a positive, gospel-centered vision of peace. Presbyterians for Earth Care (formerly Presbyterians Restoring Creation) is a nationwide network committed to caring for God's Creation and educating on eco-justice issues.

More Light Presbyterians (MLP)

Committees with business of primary interest to MLP are 05 – Mid-Councils Review, 06— Church Polity, 07-Church Orders and Ministry, 08-Authoritative Interpretation Review, 13-Civil Union and Marriage Issues, 18-Confessions of the Church, and 20-Board of Pensions.

Pro-LGBT Overtures are:

On Marriage: To amend W-4.9000

Items 13-01, 13-04, 13-06, and 13-11

On Marriage: Issue Authoritative Interpretation of W-4.9000

Items 13-02, 13-03, 13-05, 13-08, 13-09, and 13-10

Ordination

Items 07-09 and 07-13

Inclusive Church Polity

Item 06-13

Confessions

Item 18-01

Oppositional LGBT overtures are:

Reverse the recently passed G-2.0104b and reestablish G-6.0106b

Items 07-02, 07-03, 07-06, and 07-12

Allow councils to set their own standards for ordination in opposition to the *Book of Order*

Items 07-08, 07-10, 07-11, and 07-16

Allow union churches and presbyteries to reject certain standards in the *Book of Order* including G-2.0104b

Items 05-03, 05-04, 05-06, and 05-07

Preemptively allows churches to leave the denomination with their property if they disagree with G-2.0104b and other parts of the *Book of Order* without consulting the presbytery

Items 06-06 and 06-07

Would establish non-geographic presbyteries based on opposition to G-2.0104b and other parts of the *Book of Order*

Items 05-01, 05-05, and Item 05-08

Would establish "overlay" presbyteries based on opposition to G-2.0104b and other parts of the *Book of Order*

Two overtures withdrawn

Make the current definition of marriage in W-4.9001 binding for all teaching and ruling elders

Items 13-07, 13-12, and 13-13

Deny pension and healthcare benefits to certain called and installed staff persons and their families

Items 20-01 and 06-05

We Are One

More Light Presbyterians are grateful to be in the Presbyterian Church (USA)
as together we live into the ordination standards of G-2.0104.

We look forward to working on the many important issues coming before the 220th GA
and we fully support all movement toward
marriage equality in the Church.

We stand opposed to schismatic attempts to reinstate the previous aberrant ordination
standards in any form.

We are grieved by the recent efforts to undermine our community and weaken the
covenant that binds us as a Church.

We pray for the unity of our Church, and in particular
for faithful members who find themselves in conflicted congregations.

We say with Paul:

*There is one body and one Spirit,
just as [we] were called to the one hope of [our] calling;
one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Eph. 4:4-5*

MLP's complete "Legislative Affirmations" can be found at

<http://www.mlp.org/fmd/files/LegislativeAffirmationsGA220.pdf>.

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF)

Item 14-01 – support for the United Nations – **approve**

Item 14-02 – support for people of the Congo – **approve**

Item 14-03 – democratic change in the Arab world – **approve with recommended amendments**

Item 14-04 – Human Rights update – **approve**

Item 14-05 – "Encountering the Gospel of Peace Anew" – **strongly approve**

Presbyterians for Earth Care (PEC)

Items 10-05 and 10-06 – Special Offerings – **urge careful consideration in light of issues of effectiveness and implementation**

Item 11-03 – endorsing a “Fifty Year Farm Bill” -- **approve**

Item 11-07 – support for the Environmental Protection Agency – **approve**

Presbyterian Voices for Justice (PV4J)

We support the work of all of these justice-seeking groups. We lift out the following items to offer the clarity and strength of our positions:

We are immensely grateful for the passage of “10-A” last year and *Book of Order* changes that extend the full rights of membership to LGBT persons. We oppose any proposal that seeks to reverse G-2.0104b or discriminate against any group of persons.

We oppose all efforts to allow different standards within the PCUSA or divide the PCUSA into separate geographical or ecclesiastical bodies for the purpose of evading Presbyterian policy or for any other theological reason.

We support all efforts to extend the right of marriage to same-gender couples.

We support items that call for the just access to reproductive care, and we oppose any effort that would deny payment for abortions by the Board of Pensions.

We support efforts that call for comprehensive immigration reform and the compassionate treatment of immigrants.

We support efforts to strengthen Presbyterian policy on Israel-Palestine, including divestment from companies involved in the occupation of Palestine.

We support continuance of separate One Great Hour of Sharing and Peacemaking Offerings, and oppose efforts to merge them.

We oppose the effort to require at least 10% concurrence on overtures and commissioner resolutions.

We are concerned about the particular economic injustice that women and racial ethnic persons experience, and we support efforts to eliminate those disparities.

Presbyterian Voices for Justice seeks prayers for commissioners and advisory delegates as they deliberate on an extensive agenda of business. Our hope is that actions taken by the 220th General Assembly will cause “justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” May God’s Spirit move among the Assembly with power and grace.

Follow the business of the Assembly at PC-Biz on the PCUSA website (www.pcusa.org) and on the PV4J website (www.pv4j.org). You can also follow business on the websites of the groups listed above.

Since the issue of same-gender marriage will be an item of business at the upcoming General Assembly, Presbyterian Voices for Justice is pleased to include this article by the Rev. Ken Cuthbertson.

Apologia for a Marriage

By Ken Cuthbertson

On Sunday afternoon, 25 March 2012, Doug Calderwood and Ken Cuthbertson were legally married in a private ceremony at Niagara Falls, NY. A minister of the United Church of Christ presided at the ceremony performed "in the context of Christian worship." Doug and Ken have been life-partners for over twenty-five years. Doug is a PCUSA elder, and holds a M.Div. from McCormick Theological Seminary. Ken is a PCUSA minister, ordained for almost 30 years, who teaches religious studies, accompanies people as a spiritual director and retreat leader, and serves as Parish Associate in a local congregation.

The occasion of our marriage has been a long time coming, and something we never really expected to happen. When marriage laws began to change in the states several years ago it seemed like it would take years for it to reach New Mexico, where we live, and at the time we were not particularly inclined to go looking for it. Then came California, and the rising push for marriage equality, legal domestic partnerships, and civil unions across the country. In New Mexico we twice came within one vote in the State Senate of passing a domestic partnership law that would have granted "all the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage as defined by NM statute." But then the Roman Catholic hierarchy and conservative Christian groups began a major push-back effort that made it much harder for certain senators to continue their support. Meanwhile several new states passed laws permitting full civil marriage for same-gender couples... including New York State, last summer.

It was during the time that the domestic partnership law was being debated in New Mexico that we seriously began to ponder the

possibility of finally... after twenty or so years together... having a civil ceremony and a religious blessing of our relationship. As hopes in New Mexico faded, we began to think about what we might do "when" (not, "if") full marriage is reinstated in California. It would be easy enough to hop on a plane to San Francisco and have a couple of family members meet us there. But as that has dragged on, we began to consider other options such as New York, whose law took effect in the summer of 2011. So when we began to think about how we might mark our twenty-fifth anniversary as committed life-partners I said, "What if we go to New York and get married?"

The progress toward civil marriage is going surprisingly fast. But there is another process going on, the religious one. Several years ago the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s task force on the "Peace, Unity, and Purity" of the church noted that although the long struggle in the denomination had been over ordination, perhaps we should first deal with the issue of how the church regards same-gender unions. That struck a chord. And while in 2011 the PCUSA moved to remove the restrictions against the ordination of ministers, elders, and deacons who are engaged in same-gender partnerships, the marriage issue remains unresolved.

Over our years together we have talked from time to time about at least having a public blessing ceremony. But we never did. In our early years there were issues with both of our families, and we did not feel right about proceeding without including them. Nor, at the time, did we feel like we had a specific church community that would be supportive. So, we went on with our life together, sans ceremony. Now, although some of the family issues remain, we feel like we have enough support (or, at least, acceptance) from that direction, and we have the supportive faith community. We are gratified and deeply appreciative that the minister and session of the church where we worship have responded so positively, and

that so many members of the congregation have been enthusiastic in their congratulations.

Without doubt the initial impetus toward marriage has come from a desire to secure for ourselves, as best we can, the rights, responsibilities, and protections offered by civil marriage. At this point much remains to be done. The federal "Defense of Marriage Act" still bars same-gender couples from over 1,000 legal protections enjoyed by heterosexual couples. And even though we will be legally and fully married in the eyes of the State of New York, that marriage will only be recognized in the states that choose to do so. In some states our "marriage" will only be seen as equivalent to a domestic partnership or civil union as defined by their laws. And in places like Kansas, where both of our families are from, state laws and even the state constitution forbid any recognition of our marriage. (New Mexico is in an ambiguous situation, in which our Attorney General has ruled that nothing in current NM law prohibits the recognition of valid same-gender marriages in other states, but that ruling has yet to be tested in the courts.)

Over the years we have done what we can legally to protect the life we share. We have secured the various wills, legal powers of attorney, health-care powers of attorney, and so on that offer us some protections. But those protections are far from what is provided simply by a marriage license and certificate. We have designated, as possible, each other as beneficiaries on our finances, insurance, pensions, and so on. But as "unmarried" partners even those arrangements will not protect us from higher taxation and the denial of shared benefits under Social Security and such things. (This coming summer the Presbyterian Church will be extending health and pension benefits to same-gender spouses or partners of church employees who have been legally united in marriage, a domestic partnership, or a civil union.) The hope is that as current trends continue, within a few years all the protections and benefits accorded via

civil marriage will be recognized for same-gender spouses as well as heterosexually married couples.

But this is not just a matter of legal rights and protections. The eloquent arguments offered by lawyers Ted Olsen and David Boies in the lawsuit to overturn California's Proposition 8, and the equally praiseworthy ruling by Federal Judge Vaughan Walker in the case, make clear that what is at stake is not just legal equality of rights, but social equality. As a socio-cultural institution marriage is the way our society recognizes the commitment of two people to share their lives and fortunes together, and it is how we define the most basic and essential family unit.

Doug and I are very lucky. Both of us had strong well-grounded families in which our fathers and mothers were best friends as well as spouses. My parents were married for nearly fifty-four years before their deaths, just six months apart. His parents will soon celebrate their fifty-sixth wedding anniversary. Both couples shared their working lives as well as their home lives, my parents as farmers and his as Presbyterian missionaries.

Our parents and our church taught us to value marriage. Our desire to get married shows what a good job our families and congregations did in our Christian formation. (And that, I think, is perhaps the biggest irony in the current debate over same-gender marriage in the church.) The models we grew up with showed us how to love, honor, cherish, support and comfort one another. And they showed us how to turn that shared love outward to family, friends, church, and community.

We have shared our lives day by day, hour by hour, for over twenty-five years. Together have gone through the deaths of my parents and brother, Doug's heart attack and major surgeries, the birth of two daughters and the death of one, major surgeries and health challenges for both of Doug's parents, and much more. We have gone through the buying and selling of one home, and the buying of

another. We have bought furniture and appliances. Day by day and week by week we attend to paying our taxes and bills, buying groceries, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and gardening. Almost every Sunday we are to be found sitting in our usual pew at church together, and at various times serving on the church session, and in the common life of the presbytery. Yet, all the foregoing notwithstanding, after all these years we still find various family members who introduce us when we visit as one or the other's "friend" rather than life-partner. Thankfully it remains truer than ever that we are best friends. But we are more than that. We are a couple, we are a family, and we are (finally) spouses.

So what about the religious views of marriage? The Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and a vast constituency of conservative evangelical Protestant Christians, insist on the "between a man and a woman" definition of marriage, often coupling it (pun intended) with the aspect of reproductive sex and childrearing. Most, if not all, insist that this modality is the intention of the Creator, if not of the essence of creation itself as a reflection of the very divine essence of Being itself.

A more modernist and humanistic approach to marriage looks to the evolution of life, and of the socio-cultural modalities of civilization, and notes that perhaps the divine imprimatur may be not so much inherent as assigned, and more assumed than discerned. Certainly the social institution of marriage has manifested in many and various ways across the millennia, with women assigned a secondary and "proprietary" role (both as "property" and as hierarchically subordinate to the "proprietorship" of the husband) in the relationship. That much is clear from a plain reading of the biblical texts ranging from Adam and Eve, to Judah and Tamar, to Solomon and his harem, and onwards. Only in the last half century or so has the view become dominant, primarily in western Euro-American culture, that "marriage" is a fully mutual consensual union of equals, with the issue of

reproduction and childrearing being integrally related but not the primary factor.

Coming at the issue as a mainline progressive Christian, who is gay, but also deeply committed to looking at things from a scripture-honoring perspective, I would note several things:

1. While the Bible forbids particular homosexual activities (rape, idolatry, prostitution, etc.) in several instances, it never actually speaks to same-gender mutual, consensual, sexual relationships. (And, by the way, rape, idolatry, and prostitution are also equally forbidden for heterosexuals.)
2. On the other hand, the Bible strongly affirms affectional relationships (see #5, below) between persons of the same gender. But (again) does not speak to the sexual aspect of such relationships.
3. The emphasis of both Jesus and Paul concerning morality and ethics was on "love" and on just and caring relationships in the community, not on ritual "purity" or "clean" vs. "unclean" behaviors.
4. In the second creation story (Garden of Eden) it is said to be "not good" for the man to be alone, and the focus is on the creation of a "companion" and "helper" for the first human, not on procreation and reproduction. Human companionship lies at the essential core of the "good" in marriage.
5. Various biblical accounts of same-gender relationships (the covenantal relationship of Jonathan and David, the affirmations of Ruth to Naomi, etc.) remarkably resemble egalitarian "marriage" as our society has come to understand it.
6. The progress of revelatory understanding about God and the extent of God's realm is repeatedly shown to be directed away from exclusive categorizations toward inclusivity and the breaking down of divisive barriers between people. (See Isaiah 56, Acts 10, Galatians 3:28, etc.)

7. Although specific gender roles are noted according to the socio-cultural norms of the times, the basic underlying teaching concerning Christian marriage in the New Testament is about mutual submission, mutual esteem, and love, undertaken out of reverence for Christ. (Eph. 5:21, etc.)

8. The vows and promises of the historic Christian marriage covenant – “to love, honor, and cherish, to have and to hold, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live” – are neither gender-specific nor gender-exclusive. They are simply about how two people relate to one another. (And nowadays most couples omit the woman’s archaic “obey” vow.)

The core “meaning” of *Christian* marriage thus seems to be pretty consistent with the modern socio-cultural expectation of a mutual consensual union of equals, grounded in love, mutual esteem, and a commitment to sharing the journey of life together. The one distinctively Christian aspect being the undertaking to do this “out of reverence for Christ.”

If that is the essence of how we understand marriage, then it seems to me that there is no good reason to restrict it to heterosexual couples in either the civil or religious context. Equality, mutual consent, love, esteem, and intention are not gender-specific. And neither is reverence for Christ. The word and the institution are the means by which our society recognizes and affirms that type of committed covenantal relationship. If that type of relationship occurs between persons of the same gender as it does between heterosexuals – and it DOES – then we need to recognize and admit that they are married. And, as Christians, if we truly believe that “Love is of God, and anyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7), then we also need to admit that these marriages are something sacred to be blessed and honored in God’s Name.

And that is what my *husband* and I did on March 25, 2012. After twenty-five years of

living the reality, we made it all official and legal, and we at last had our *marriage* blessed in God’s name by a minister of the church. For some that is a blasphemy. For us it is the grace of God, and we are somewhat amazed at how deeply moved we have been by the experience.

Trusting God as Some Leave the Presbyterian Church (USA)

By [Bruce Reyes-Chow](#), Moderator of the 218th General Assembly



Photo by Maja Larsson

I remember during the early days of planting the church that I pastored for 12 years. While I loved the work, there were stressors everywhere. Anxiety inducing questions arose all the time: “Would anyone show up?” “Would they stay if they did come?” and “Who’s going to make the coffee?” By far, though, the hardest question to deal with was, “What happens when someone leaves?”

Like most new church planting pastors, when someone chose to leave, no matter the reason, my heart and soul ached: I questioned my pastoral abilities, I grieved the loss of relationships and I always had an urge to do something to get them back. One of the things that I learned over those dozen years of saying hello and goodbye to folks is that, while there was always room for self-reflection, more times than not there was no one to blame. I also learned that when the leaving was caused by a difference in theological perspectives, there was no amount of arguing that ever got someone to stay once they had decided to leave. The best course of action was to model graciousness and understanding, even if/when it was not reciprocated.

These situations did not happen often, but over time I noticed a cycle and rhythm to the life of the church when, not not only were people *going* to leave, in order for everyone to thrive and grow, sometimes people *needed* to leave. After all, if I truly cared about their spiritual well-being and growth, I wanted them to do the hard work of discernment and then follow where God was leading them. As their pastor, my job was not about theological victory or numerical success, it was about leading in a way that everyone grew in their experience and expression of faith. Period.

In a recent piece printed by the Presbyterian News Service, Fred Heuser, Executive Director of the [Presbyterian Historical Society](#), makes a case for taking a longer view of the life of the Presbyterian Church (USA):

Presbyterians are a discerning people who seek the will of God through reading the Bible, prayer and being in communion with each other and other Christians. But the discernment process has meant that Presbyterians have a long history of disagreement, conflict, schism, and reunions.

The conflict and divisiveness within the PC (USA) today is part of a broader pattern that is deeply rooted in our past. The “flash points” that have produced these conflicts may be different, but the underlying tensions that birthed them are remarkably similar.

What is new is that these conflicts and tensions feel new to us. I suspect that these tensions feel new because we are trying to understand them outside of any historical framework.

One of the reasons that [recent developments in the Presbyterian Church \(USA\)](#) have not caused me great anxiety is that I think we may be experiencing such a cycle and rhythm of our life. Our struggle now is to move away from the many adversarial postures that exist and acknowledge that God may indeed be working

through and in all of us during these days of denominations shifts.

Now of course, this does not mean that I do not care or do not grieve the loss of the denominational relationships with those who are leaving, but I also do not begrudge anyone or have an overwhelming urge to fight to make people stay when they are feeling like this is no longer a good place for them. What I am trying to do is to be gracious in the face of frequent castigation and loving as I see colleagues move into a new denominational relationship; all the while, remaining committed and faithful to my part in discerning what it means to be the Presbyterian Church (USA) today and into the future.

Yes, there are questions about property, pensions and legalities, but I firmly believe that if more people than not adopt a spirit of graciousness and understanding, ways forward will emerge that all can agree too. All of that aside, my deepest hope and prayer is that new surroundings and new relationships will allow everyone, those who remain and those who leave, to live into God’s intentions for our lives be it in [the Presbyterian Church \(USA\)](#), [the Evangelical Presbyterian Church](#), [the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians](#) or wherever folks may find their denominational home.

Lord hear our prayer . . .



Looking toward the 220th General Assembly

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Network News

From Presbyterian Voices for Justice

c/o Sylvia Carlson

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