

GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXPERIENCES

Thinking about submitting an application to attend? Read what others have experienced at previous General Assemblies! Spirit-led adventures await!

Jim Speedy – former Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Carlisle

I have attended 6 General Assemblies, the last being in 2018. All of them were “pre-Covid”. I was never a Commissioner from Carlisle rather I served as Stated Clerk representative. Part of my duties was to be the Parliamentarian for several GA committees.

I agree with Bill that my experiences are not the same as those who participated in recent GA’s. I will say that I was in awe as I felt the Holy Spirit’s presence, particularly through our Polity. Also, the diversity of the Commissioners was amazing. I am a born and bred Presbyterian. My attendance and participation reinforced why I am. I recommend attendance when you have the opportunity.

Kemper Dyson – attended as a Young Adult Advisory Delegate (YAAD) from Middle Spring

I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the “bigger picture” in the denomination. It meant a lot to me to serve in this capacity. My congregation is small and largely consists of an aging population. It was refreshing and enlightening to learn that there is so much more than just Shippensburg. Being able to connect to other folks my age who understand the challenge of balancing college, a job, friends, family, church leadership, and making space for God in a world that doesn't always accept you was extremely meaningful. I still have connections with people from all over, and we talk about the challenges and joys we face as young adults. I was surprised to learn what goes on at the PC(USA) national level. It was such a cool experience. I remember vividly sitting in a conference room in Louisville, feeling the presence of God. This conference was unlike anything I'd been a part of. There were many people there, most of whom I never got to meet, but I felt safe. The way that we were able to respectfully and lovingly problem-solve was something that we don't see on any national governing level. For first-time YAADs, I'd encourage them to lean on other YAADs and advisors. They are vital for remembering why you are there and the mission- serve and love. If anyone has any desire to serve the denomination, I'd encourage them to step out of their comfort zone and go to Salt Lake City!

Bill McHenry – RE Highland United

Much like Jim, I am Presbyterian Born and Bred. I know my grandmother attended a GA as a Commissioner for Redstone Presbytery many years ago. The sense of connectedness was palpable for me. Even though my experience of the grand worship services were all Online, I believe the effort to find a variety of contributors; Native Americans, Native Pacific Islanders, African Americans, Asian Americans among them, made the worship services, musical interludes, and experiences unique. I've attended large group worships (Trienniums), and know how GAs in the past have had similar experiences, but this was something I had to be more engaged in to make it more than what I was expecting.

I enjoyed the Committee work I did in person in Louisville, and getting to see the place from

which the PC(USA) engages the world. I enjoyed the discussion and debate of the committee I served even with those who were not in agreement with the positions I hold. I truly enjoyed getting to know my fellow commissioners from around the world.

*I was surprised by my surroundings. The Art, The Food, The History, The people who were there to care for us. I was also surprised that the bar-tender at one of the restaurants at the Galt House Hotel had to look up how to mix a Presbyterian! *Jim - I hear you laughing now!**

God was EVERYWHERE... In our discussions, in the protestors outside the Presbyterian Center, in our worships, and in the on line sessions where we voted on the overtures placed before us. Even in the large Catholic gathering in the Hotel at the same time we were engaged in our committee meetings!

This was my first time as a Commissioner. I would say be open to the possibilities. Be open to those around you. Be open to hear the voice of God in your personal and corporate deliberations.

The next GA will be held in an opposite fashion from the GA I experienced... Your Committee meetings will be on line, and the General Plenaries will be in person. You'll have more people to meet, but you'll have a core group from your committee to first get to know, and then find and share meals and sightseeing with... The work is hard. It is mentally taxing, but it is ultimately fulfilling in a way few get to experience. It will be amazing!

Peter Dietz - TE US Navy

This was my first experience as a commissioner and it was much different than the three times I had been as an observer in the past.

I have enjoyed going to GA as an observer because it connected me with the larger church. I have attended several Presbyterian Churches over the years, and they have been different, but going to GA opened my eyes to how huge and expansive the Presbyterian Church is. There is so much to the denomination that we often miss because our focus is often turned toward our own communities and experiences. What is inspiring to me is what I see and learn that can have an impact on my local church, community or setting, or how I can also be part of the bigger far-reaching impact of the church. This participation might be in the form of supporting or promoting a missionary I met or a project that Presbyterian Disaster Relief is working on, or how a struggling rural church is finding new ways to be a light of hope in their community.

Another positive part of attending GA is running into other Presbyterians I know from over the years but haven't seen in a long time, or meeting the people whose articles I've read in the Outlook, or walking among all the vendors—and there have been many. I always left with a pile of new books! And then there is the worship service. Although this time I didn't get to experience that in the same way because of it being virtual, in the past it was amazing to do church as a Presbyterian in a setting that was that huge! Wow!

Going to GA as a commissioner was a totally different experience for me. To be honest, I thought it was going to be boring and exhausting. I'm an active person and sitting in a room for a long time talking about policy sounded like hell to me. I volunteered to be a commissioner because I had a responsibility to do it as an ordained elder in the church and it was a responsibility I wanted to honor. I could not have been more wrong about the experience of being a commissioner. It was fun, interesting, engaging and meaningful. I was actually eager to get back in the room and continue the discussions with my cohorts as we discussed the items of business before us. I can't think of too many people who enjoy debating church policy (I do know one or two) but it was actually a great experience because what people talked about were thoughtful and meaningful issues with real consequences. Having those conversations with people I disagreed with was helpful to better understand a different perspective. Although my position on an issue never really changed, I did find myself receptive to different ways on how it might be implemented. I also had a better understanding on why somethings I didn't think were important to the denomination might actually be.

My encounter with God at GA was and has been varied and sometimes unexpected. Whether it was in a large worship service or hearing how people's lives have been impacted and saved or at least supported by the efforts of the denomination, or the struggles of survival and purpose of the small rural church, God was always there. Worshipping God and doing the work of God was always the goal, even when we disagreed on what the goal was, we were all striving to find it and follow it. There were times that were frustrating and disappointing, and I didn't think God would be happy, but in the end, I felt like I was on an oar of a big ship and I had just pulled the church one stroke closer to God's Kingdom and God was pleased.