

## What Commissioners and Delegates Do at General Assembly

*A Leader Reader by Sharon K. Youngs*

By now, all 173 presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have elected their commissioners to the 220th General Assembly (2012). Those commissioners—688 in all—and 221 advisory delegates will make their way to Pittsburgh to serve in their respective roles when the assembly meets June 30–July 7.

But their work as commissioners and advisory delegates will have begun long before the gavel sounds to convene the assembly. Let's imagine that Blossom Creek Presbytery has elected Helen as a commissioner and Peter as a young adult advisory delegate to this year's assembly.<sup>1</sup> Let's follow them as they fill their respective roles before, during, and after the assembly.

### Before the Assembly

The work that Helen and Peter will do during the time leading up to the General Assembly may be equally or more important than what they will do at the assembly.

One of their first activities will be orientation—a responsibility of Blossom Creek Presbytery. Some presbyteries will do this in a single meeting, others in a series of gatherings. Blossom Creek will join other presbyteries in its synod for an overnight event that, among other things, will introduce Helen and Peter to other commissioners and advisory delegates and build a sense of community among them.

The two will learn about such things as parliamentary procedure, what a General Assembly does, and the responsibilities of commissioners and advisory delegates. They will learn about Pittsburgh and the daily schedule for this year's assembly. They will also take a

### Prayer

“O blessed Trinity, in whom we know the Maker of all things seen and unseen, the Savior of all both near and far: By your Spirit enable us so to worship your divine majesty, that with all the company of heaven we may magnify your glorious name, saying: Holy, holy, holy. Glory to you, O Lord most high. Amen.”

—*Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox press, 1993), 348.

look at the overtures coming before the highest governing body of the PC(USA). They will watch short orientation videos and webinars for commissioners and advisory delegates provided online by the Office of the General Assembly ([www.pcusa.org/ga220](http://www.pcusa.org/ga220)) to supplement the information from Blossom Creek.

Helen and Peter will spend the greatest amount of their preparation time reading the business items that have been submitted to the General Assembly for consideration (<http://pc-biz.org>). While they will read all of the overtures and reports, Helen will pay particular attention to the items for Committee 7 (Church Orders and Ministry), and Peter will focus on the items for Committee 3 (GA Procedures), which are the committees to which they have been randomly assigned by a computer.

### During the Assembly

Helen and Peter will arrive in Pittsburgh in time to attend preassembly events, which include three peri-

ods of forty-five-minute conversations about key issues coming to the assembly.

The two will take their assigned seats in the plenary hall in time for opening worship of the General Assembly on Saturday afternoon, June 30. Thousands of Presbyterian from the local area will join them. That first evening they will cast their vote for the new GA Moderator.

Sunday morning all commissioners, advisory delegates, and guests of the General Assembly will worship in local Presbyterian churches throughout Pittsburgh. Beginning Sunday afternoon and extending into the next two days, Helen and Peter will participate in their respective assembly committees, which are two of a total of twenty-one committees. They will hear presentations on the business items they studied in advance, some of which may involve hearing from overture advocates and having designated times for open hearings. Their committees will reach decisions that will go to the full assembly for information or for action.

All of the committees will complete their work by Wednesday morning. The remainder of the week will be plenary days as the full assembly hears reports from each committee and acts on committees' recommendations. Helen or Peter might feel moved to speak to the assembly about an item being considered. Like all of the other commissioners and advisory delegates, the two will listen carefully and prayerfully to the discussion, and Helen will cast her vote as she feels led by the Spirit.

Intermingled among the committee meetings and plenary sessions will be a variety of activities, many of which will take place at mealtimes—seminary gatherings, award presentations, gatherings of different constituencies from across the church and around the world, just to name a few.

### Keeping Up with General Assembly

Whether or not you attend, you can keep up with the business and activities of the General Assembly by visiting [www.pcusa.org/ga220](http://www.pcusa.org/ga220), the official Web site for the 220th General Assembly (2012) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

If Helen and Peter are typical of former commissioners and advisory delegates, they will note that daily worship was a highlight of their assembly experience, as well as the opportunity to visit an exhibit hall filled with resources and displays of every kind. They will also mention the enrichment and inspiration from having met so many Presbyterians from across the country and truly feeling connected to the larger church.

## After the Assembly

Helen and Peter's jobs are not finished once they return home. After they catch up on their sleep they will begin the critical work of sharing their experiences and interpreting the actions taken by the 220th General Assembly. Most likely they will be asked by Blossom Creek Presbytery to make a presentation at one of the stated meetings. Their home congregations will want to hear from them, as will other congregations in the area.

After it's all over, Helen and Peter, along with the other commissioners and advisory delegates to this year's General Assembly, will have discerned together the mind of Christ for the PC(USA).

And to that, we will say, "Well done, good and faithful servants" (Matt. 25:21, NIV).

## Endnote

1. The number of commissioners from a presbytery is determined by the number of members of the congregations within the presbytery (*Book of Order*, G-3.0501). Advisory delegates to the General Assembly encompass four categories: 173 Young Adult Advisory Delegates (one from each presbytery), twenty-five Theological Seminary Advisory Delegates, eight Missionary Advisory Delegates, and fifteen Ecumenical Advisory Delegates. These delegates serve alongside commissioners, with the distinction being that they have the privileges of voice and vote in their respective assembly committees, but voice only when the assembly meets in plenary to take final action on business.

## About the Writer

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