

## God's Presence at General Assembly

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

By Sharon Youngs

### Entering the General Assembly

Picture yourself approaching a rather large room ahead. Just inside the doorway you pour into a bowl the small amount of water you brought from home. You proceed to your seat, introduce yourself to those sitting nearby, and look around. Your seat and the thousand or so others are positioned around a platform similar to the layout of some church sanctuaries. At the top of the few steps that lead up to the platform is a baptismal font. Soon a small number of people walk down the aisle and up the steps to the font. They fill the font with water that includes the small portion you brought as well as portions from the others who have gathered in the room. One of the leaders prays and then invites everyone to turn to those around them and pray together. After praying together, more than a thousand voices join in singing "Down to the River to Pray" by Alison Krauss. And then the gavel sounds to begin the first session of the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) this coming July in Minneapolis.

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### More Than Parliamentary Procedure

A Presbyterian General Assembly is filled with committees and plenaries and overtures and briefings and discussions and debates. But it is also filled with times for worship, Bible study, prayer, reflection, and music. A General Assembly is much more than parliamentary procedure and votes. There is a spiritual aspect to the assembly that undergirds and supports the legislative work. It is those times of worship and prayer that bind the commissioners, advisory delegates, visitors, staff, and all who have gathered from the east, west, north, and south for the assembly together into a community of faith.

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### This Year's Assembly

As plans proceed for the 219th General Assembly (July 3-10), specific attention is being given to how to increase and strengthen the spiritual aspect of the meeting. Here are some examples:

*Bible study.* Even before the commissioners and advisory delegates arrive in Minneapolis, they and everyone across the denomination will have available online through [The Presbyterian Leader a Bible study](#) written specifically for this assembly by Matt Skinner, a Presbyterian minister who teaches New Testament at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

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### UPCOMING LECTIONARY TEXTS

#### May 16—7th Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:16–34; Ps. 97; Rev. 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21; John 17:20–26

#### May 23—Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1–21; Ps. 104:24–34, 35b; Rom. 8:14–17; John 14:8–17 (25–27)

#### May 30—Trinity Sunday

Prov. 8:1–4, 22–31; Ps. 8; Rom. 5:1–5; John 16:12–15

#### June 6—10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 17:8–16 (17–24); Ps. 146; Gal. 1:11–24; Luke 7:11–17

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Weekly Revised Common Lectionary podcast of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

### PENTECOST

The Day of Pentecost marks the end of the Easter season. The word Pentecost, taken from the Greek, means "fiftieth day," and the festival is derived from the Jewish festival of Shavuot, which took place fifty days after Passover. The Jewish festival was an annual commemoration of the giving of the Law to Moses and the establishment of a new relationship between Israel and God. Pentecost indicates the establishment of a new relationship between God and the new Israel, the followers of Jesus Christ.

Pentecost is the celebration of the creation of the church of Jesus Christ as recorded in Acts 2. As Christ was raised from the dead, the Body of Christ was given new life by the Spirit (breath) of God. This is the church's spiritual birthday.

The life-giving Spirit sends the church into the world to carry out Christ's mission. The church is clearly a world church, proclaiming the Word of God in Jesus Christ to all peoples. Babel (Gen. 11:1–9) is undone as the message is heard in every tongue (Acts 2:5–11). The church goes forth into all the world, breaking down walls and overcoming divisions that keep people from knowing their true unity in God.

Red is the traditional color, suggesting the fire of the spirit coming on the church at Pentecost.

From [The ABCs of Worship](#) by Donald Wilson Stake, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 145.

### TRINITY SUNDAY

*The font.* This year's theme, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38), lends itself well to baptismal imagery, such as the font that will be front-and-center of the commissioners and advisory delegates as they work to discern the mind of Christ for the PC(USA). While each of them will have brought a small portion of water to pour into the font, what is more important will be the rivers of living water that pour from them in the Spirit-led decisions they will make over the course of their week together.

*Worship.* The opening Communion service on Sunday, July 4, will include not only those who have traveled to Minneapolis for the assembly but also thousands more Presbyterians in the Twin Cities area. In addition, worship will be on the schedule each day, and the traditional ecumenical service will take place in Westminster Presbyterian Church, just down the street from the convention center.

*Prayer.* A room will be set aside for commissioners, advisory delegates, and others to use for quiet prayer, reflection, and meditation. The area is being designed by volunteer members of the Committee on Local Arrangements, a group of the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area that, along with other myriad tasks for the assembly, is planning the opening and daily worship services.

The opening prayer for each session of the assembly will take place around the baptismal font. New at this assembly will be the practice of inviting commissioners and advisory delegates to turn to a few others in the row in front or behind them to form small groups to pray on a regular basis.

But praying for the General Assembly is not limited to those who will be in Minneapolis! Individuals, sessions, congregations, and groups across the PC(USA) are encouraged to begin praying now for the meeting, for the Moderator who will be elected the first night of the assembly, and especially for those who will be serving as commissioners and advisory delegates. In addition, the Reverend Grady Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, has written a call to prayer for the assembly that will be featured in the 2010 *Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study* on July 3rd, opening day.

Finally, the *Book of Common Worship* contains a prayer for a General Assembly meeting. You are invited to use it often before and during the gathering of what is the highest governing body of the PC(USA):

Almighty God, in Jesus Christ you called disciples and, by the Holy Spirit, made them one church to serve you. Be with members of our *General Assembly*. Help them to welcome new things you are doing in the world, and to respect old things you keep and use. Save them from empty slogans or senseless controversies. In their deciding, determine what is good for us and for all people. As this *General Assembly* meets, let your Spirit rule, so that our church may be joined in love and service to Jesus Christ, who, having gone before us, is coming to meet us in the promise of your kingdom. **Amen.**

(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993, 805)

Let's go down, down in the river to pray.

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## About the Writer

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The doctrine that God, while being one, exists eternally in three "persons," usually called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The word "Trinity" itself does not appear in Scripture. The Greek form, *trias*, seems to have been first used by Bishop Theophilus of Antioch in the second century. However, the basic ingredients of the doctrine are indeed found in Scripture, where Jesus is considered worthy of worship, and yet is clearly not the One to whom he refers as "Father," and where the Spirit is promised by Jesus as "another Comforter." Thus, it may be argued that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity is simply the clarification and definition of what was already implicit in Scripture.

From [Essential Theological Terms](#) by Justo L. González, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 175.

## A GROUP STUDY ON THE [TRINITY](#)

Is the concept of the Trinity in the Bible? Or was it a political maneuver by the Emperor Constantine? These are common questions and arguments about the Trinity—God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. This four-session study allows participants to look at the history of the Trinity, look to the scriptural references, debate the issues, and discover some practical implications of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Best-selling author and Presbyterian minister Michael Lindvall wrote this study named "The Trinity" for Presbyterian Leader.com. Each session consists of a four-page handout for participants to read and a Leader's Guide written by Presbyterian pastor and educator Christy Lang. You may find it by [clicking here](#).

Subscribers may download this study (and all content on the program) as part of their subscription for no cost. Others may purchase it for \$18 and print out unlimited copies for use in your congregation.

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