

What Commissioners and Delegates Do at General Assembly

Wednesday, May 26, 2010

By Sharon K. Youngs

By now, all 173 presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have elected their commissioners to the 219th General Assembly (2010). Those commissioners—712 in all—and 221 advisory delegates will make their way to Minneapolis to serve in their respective roles when the assembly meets July 3–10. 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.¹ Let's follow them as they fill their respective roles before, during, and after the assembly.

[Back to top](#)

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 Minneapolis and the daily schedule for this year's assembly. They will also take a look at the overtures coming before the highest governing body of the PC(USA). They will watch short orientation videos for commissioners and advisory delegates provided online by the Office of the General Assembly (www.pcusa.org/ga219) 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 6 (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.

[Back to top](#)

During the Assembly

Helen and Peter will arrive in Minneapolis in time to attend preassembly events, which include antiracism training and "Riverside Conversations"—opportunities for commissioners and advisory delegates to hear about and begin discussing among themselves some of the major items coming to the assembly. The two will take their assigned seats in the plenary hall in time for the opening session of the General Assembly on Saturday

In This Issue

- [Before the Assembly](#)
- [During the Assembly](#)
- [After the Assembly](#)
- [Endnote](#)
- [About the Writer](#)

Upcoming Lectionary Texts

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

June 13—11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 21:1–10 (11–14) 15–21a; Ps. 5:1–8; Gal. 2:15–21; Luke 7:36–8:3

June 20—12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 19:1–4 (5–7) 8–15a; Ps. 42 and 43; Gal. 3:23–29; Luke 8:26–39

Subscribe to 'Hear the Word'

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

Keeping Up with the 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/ga219, the official Web site for the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.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.

Summer Worship Series at Montreat Conference Center

Consider attending the Summer Worship Series at Montreat Conference Center this summer from June 6 through August 8. Check out www.montreat.org for more information.

Keep a Sabbath

afternoon, July 3, during which they will be commissioned for their work. That first evening they will cast their vote for the new GA Moderator. They will gather with others at the assembly and thousands of Presbyterians from the local area for opening worship the next day. And they will join everyone on an island in the Mississippi River for the Minneapolis Fourth of July fireworks display that evening.

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 nineteen 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 Tuesday evening. 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.

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.

[Back to top](#)

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 219th 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).

[Back to top](#)

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-13.0102). 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.

[Back to top](#)

About the Writer

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Keep a Sabbath

On your calendar, look up the next four Sundays (or if that is unrealistic, another regular day of the week) and write "special" in the space. Make plans that will allow these to become the most enjoyable and relaxing days of the seven that make up each week.

First, decide what will definitely not happen on those days (for instance, household chores, inadequate sleep, trudging through the supermarket).

Second, decide what you will do instead. Include things that you will recognize as a treat from God to you, and also things that are, in a sense, a treat from you to God. Follow the biblical principles of a Sabbath by including space for worship, space for reflecting on life, and space for administering care to others.

After four Sabbaths, analyze whether this is improving the rhythm of your life and consider extending it. If habits you have gotten into make the day arduous (such as obligations to cook a special dinner), think creatively about alternatives.

From [99 Things to Do between Here and Heaven](#) by Kathleen Long Bostrom and Peter Graystone (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), number 31.

Some Facts about Worshipers

Gender Differences

There are fewer men (39%) in worship than women (61%) . . . In fact, there are more women than men in the pews in every age category . . . The smallest gender gap between worshipers is among people between 15 and 24 years of age. In this age group, the percentage of female worshipers exceeds male worshipers by only 14%.

How Old Are They?

The average age of a worshiper is 54 years. . . The average worshiper is 10 years older than the average American. Among worshipers, those between the ages of 45 and 64 (39%) are the biggest age group.

How Much Education Do They Have?

Worshipers in the U.S. tend to be well educated. The U.S. Census reports that across the country about 27% of the population has a college degree or higher education. The Census reports this figure for people 25 years of age or older. Among worshipers 25 years of age or older, the figure is 47%. This percentage climbs to 53% for attendees less than 65 years of age. Fully 95% of all worshipers have completed high school.

From [A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations, Second Edition](#) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 12–15.

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