



July 10, 2010

To Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

*“Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water”* (John 7:38) ...

Just one week ago, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) convened with Scripture and music and prayer. Commissioners and advisory delegates from every presbytery across the church gathered around the baptismal font with hopeful expectation of what God’s Spirit would do in and through them as they sought to discern together the mind of Christ for the PC(USA).

As the week progressed, prayer was a foundational part of each day’s deliberations and decisions, and the presence of the Spirit was palpable!

***“Out of the believer’s heart...”***

While all assemblies are significant, this one holds particular significance in the life of the PC(USA). Among the assembly’s decisions – to be ratified by presbyteries – are the addition of the Belhar Confession to *The Book of Confessions* and a revised Form of Government. Both of these items give a clear signal that we are a church that is not afraid to change – an important perspective to have in these days of great change in the church and the world.

The assembly celebrated and was greatly encouraged by the commissioning of 122 young adult volunteers and 17 new mission workers for service around the globe. Commissioners voted unanimously to renew the call to “Grow Christ’s Church Deep and Wide” and were inspired by the stories (<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/evangelism>) of congregations that are growing in evangelism, discipleship, diversity, and servanthood. They celebrated the generosity of Presbyterians who have contributed more than \$10.5 million to relief and redevelopment work in Haiti in the wake of January’s devastating earthquake.

The assembly also engaged in discussion about significant matters of faith and life – ordination standards, justice and peace in the Middle East, and civil union and marriage, to name just a few.

Information on the more than 300 assembly actions is available at <http://pc-biz.org>. Answers to frequently asked questions about the items that have already garnered media attention are attached to this letter and available online ([www.pcusa.org/ga219](http://www.pcusa.org/ga219)). We commend these resources to you for their accurate and straightforward information.

While the content of the assembly’s decisions is important, what may be of equal or greater importance is the *manner* in which commissioners and advisory delegates did their work. They debated, but did not fight. They tackled tough issues while refraining from tackling each other. They placed great value on finding common ground as they displayed gracious, mutual forbearance toward one another. They sought the will of God within their actions, rather than regarding their decisions as the will of God. One commissioner called the experience of seeking – and finding – common ground truly “miraculous.”

In short, this assembly exhibited to the whole church and, indeed, to our society and the world a way to engage in difficult issues while maintaining respect for one another. To put it another way, they exhibited well what it means for the church to “a provisional demonstration of what God intends for the world” (Book of Order, G-3.0200).

*...shall flow rivers of living water.”*

Just a few short hours ago, the 219th General Assembly ended in the same worshipful manner with which it began, as well as with a similar same sense of hopeful expectation that the hard work done in Minneapolis will continue forward across the church.

Michael East and Caroline Sherard, elected by their peers as co-moderators of the young adult advisory delegates to this assembly, shared their thoughts in a blog entry ([www.pcusa.org/ga219](http://www.pcusa.org/ga219)):

If all our commissioners and advisory delegates returned to their places of community and encouraged others to continue similar stories, what great things could be next for the PC(USA)? These narratives have the ability to inspire discussions on new, creative, and innovative ways of being the Church. At the heart of being Presbyterian is the principle belief that our discernment is best done when we gather together. Being able to gather in one place, as one people, for the one Church is a powerful and transformative experience--one which dramatically shapes future generations.

The assembly has commended to the church a number of items for further study, out of which is hoped will come, as Michael and Caroline write, “new, creative, and innovative ways of being the Church.”

May the good and faithful work begun in Minneapolis truly be just the beginning of a season of respectful, earnest, and gracious engagement – both in our words and in our deeds – all for the sake of the gospel.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,



Elder Cynthia Bolbach  
Moderator, 219th General Assembly



The Rev. Gradye Parsons  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly



The Rev. Landon Whitsitt  
Vice Moderator, 219th General Assembly



Elder Linda Bryant Valentine  
Executive Director, General Assembly Mission Council