

## REPORT AND REFLECTIONS ON THE 219TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY – Lynne Shoemaker

It was my privilege and pleasure to represent the Presbytery of Geneva at the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The following is a brief summary of the actions of the Assembly with some of my personal reflections.

After several days of committee meetings, the plenary session began with a vote to choose our Moderator from among 6 candidates. Cindy Bolbach, a lawyer and elder from the National Capital Presbytery was elected on the 4<sup>th</sup> ballot. Landon Whitsitt, a 33 year old pastor from Missouri was elected as Vice-Moderator. Their platform was decidedly progressive and supportive of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual) role within the PC-USA. If their actions at G.A. are any indication, I look forward to 2 years of excellent leadership from them.

The following resolutions were approved by G.A. and will be presented to the 173 Presbyteries for a vote of confirmation:

**ORDINATION STANDARDS:** Once again Presbyteries will be asked to vote on the removal of the 1997 requirement that those ordained practice “fidelity if married and chastity if single”. (The issue of ordination standards as well as the definition of “marriage” was further complicated when the G.A. voted to table, rather than decide on an overture that would have empowered pastors to perform marriages for same gender couples in states where these marriages are legal. Both the majority and minority committee reports on this issue are to be sent to Presbyteries for further study and discussion.)

**FORM OF GOVERNMENT:** The G.A. has asked the Presbyteries to vote on the proposed new form of government for the denomination. The proposal has been discussed in committee for 4 years and seeks to give the church more flexibility in responding to local ministry needs in a time of change and shrinking denominational resources. Related to this was the approval of the formation of a commission to assist struggling middle governing bodies who request such help.

**BELHAR CONFSSION:** The Assembly voted to send the Belhar Confession to the Presbyteries for their ratification. A two-thirds vote of approval from the 173 Presbyteries is required. If approved, the Confession will receive final consideration by the 220<sup>th</sup> G.A. before being added to the Book of Confessions.

**OTHER SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS** (not requiring vote by Presbyteries):

**HEIDELBERG CONFSSION:** A special commission was appointed to retranslate the Heidelberg Confession in order to correct mistranslated passages from the original German. Of special concern were mistranslated passages relating to the condemnation of homosexuals. The new translation will be presented to the next General Assembly for approval.

**MIDDLE EAST REPORT:** An earlier report, considered by many to be too pro-Palestinian was rewritten in committee to present a more carefully balanced, historically accurate narrative of Middle Eastern conflicts. The revised report was overwhelmingly approved by the G.A.

My general impression is that there is a strong desire for unity within the PC-USA; however, strong diversity of opinion and potential divisions do exist. This is especially true on the question of LGBT rights and participation. I sensed a sadness and occasional anger among many conservative commissioners who felt the Church was moving in the wrong direction, while many progressive commissioners expressed frustration at the slow-moving, deliberative process within our denomination. I recognize that much of this diversity is reflective of the social, political, and even geographic divisions within our nation, but I believe it does create serious concerns for the future of our church. Still, at least outwardly at this General Assembly, a spirit of respect for freedom of conscience and an apparent willingness to work for mutual benefit within the PC-USA seemed to prevail.