

Interview with Presbytery of Nevada Commissioners
to the 222nd General Assembly June 18-25, 2016

We are so grateful for our Commissioners to the 222nd General Assembly held in Portland, Oregon. It is a lot of work to be a commissioner! There is a huge amount of reading and prayerful reflection before you leave home, then hours of meetings, more reading and reflection, and the responsibility of voting your conscience with integrity.

We were well-served this year by our TE Commissioner, the Rev. Bob Kelley (Lake Tahoe Community PC), our RE Commissioner Marshall Hanson (Henderson PC) and our Young Adult Advisory Delegate (YAAD), Eva Karttunen (Westminster PC).

Though they will be sharing their “official” GA report at the Fall Presbytery meeting, not everyone may get the chance to hear the reports, so the following “interview” is an opportunity for them to share their personal experience and impressions of General Assembly.

Please join me in thanking Marshall (**MH**), Eva (**EK**) and Bob (**BK**) for their continuing service to the Presbytery!

Yours in Christ, Hilda (**HP**) Presbytery Pastor

HP: *As you reflect on your experience at General Assembly, what surprised you most about GA?*

MH: This is my second time as a commissioner and 3rd time at a GA. What was most surprising to me was the election of 2 co-moderators. The election of our 2 moderators who were 2 lady pastors an Anglo and an African-American and their margin of victory.

EK: I think what most surprised me most about GA was all the different agencies and things that the PC (U.S.A.) is doing. The church is a lot more spread out than I imagined, and is doing a lot more than I thought. It really opened up my eyes and the possibilities that the church holds. Another thing was all the committees that there were. We had to vote on all sorts of things. It was still pretty awesome.

BK: After going to the Detroit assembly, I was pretty well prepared. If anything surprised me, it was the smaller attendance. In Detroit, everywhere you turned there were groups of lots of people who were lobbying for one cause or another. I did not see very many lobbying groups in Portland. Maybe it was too expensive to go there, or the issues weren't as controversial.

HP: *Share a time when you felt the movement of the Holy Spirit at GA.*

MH: I felt the movement of the Holy Spirit most during the inspiring messages presented by the Daily worship services. I especially liked the turned on, inspired and enthusiastic message by Pastor Alice Ridgill with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

EK: I felt it when we made the historic vote to approve the Belhar Confessions. It was the greatest thing I ever saw, and all the unity in the room that I felt was inspiring.

BK: What, just one time? I felt it in worship and in our plenary sessions, but I think I felt it most in my committee meeting (Middle East Issues). We had differing opinions, but the committee truly acted with respect for each other, and when we voted, we knew it was right.

HP: *What gives you the most hope for the future of the PC(USA)?*

MH: What gives me the most hope about the PCUSA is that the outgoing moderator Heath Rada set up” the way forward “ conversations and wants the church to take a look at itself and decide how we are going to be a relevant denomination and how will the Holy Spirit lead us in the future.

EK: I think all the young people that are actually involved in the church really gives me hope for the future. Coming from a church where the youngest member is about 18 years old, it really makes me feel good.

BK: I have heard that previous General Assemblies were pretty contentious. What I saw at this General Assembly was a group of people who were genuinely committed to the church and to what the church does. There was disagreement about methods but not about the church moving forward. It may be that now that those who violently disagreed have left the denomination, the remnant is ready to move forward. Not that we still all agree, but I think those of us who are left, love the PC(USA) and feel it can help our churches in our mission.

HP: *What concerns you most about the future of the PC(USA)?*

MH: What concerns me most about the future of the PCUSA is perhaps the over emphasis on social justice issues at the expense of evangelism and mission in the local church. Too much time is spent on foreign policy issues and apologies for perceived wrongs to various groups rather than by spreading the Gospel and how the local church can do these things better.

EK: What concerns me most... is possibly the fact that even the younger people have mildly conservative views. While I was there, we had a vote on repealing the ability to officiate homosexual marriage. Even some of the young people voted to repeal it. It made me worried about what could happen in the future if we don't decide to change.

BK: We are great at social mission but not so much at evangelism. We say we want more members, but we only want those members who will come in on their own, and keep the church just the same as it has always been. The classic example is the youth. We want them, but we are not willing to take the time to actually understand them, or to gear our fellowship or our worship towards them.

HP: *Share a personal memory from GA that you will cherish.*

MH: The personal memory I will cherish most will be the opportunity to worship at a nearby congregation on Sunday. I attended the Orenco Pres church in Hillsboro. It had a gentleman and lady Pastor, a music worship team, and did local and world mission, supported a daycare, community garden project, youth programs and were super friendly and still growing in a 200 member church. They looked to me like a church on fire for the Lord and wove scripture into their message. A great church we can all learn from.

EK: I think I will cherish the memory of the little jokes that were made while we were there and the conversation with the TSAD (Theological Seminary Advisory Delegate) that sat next to me.

BK: I think my most important personal memory is Art Ritter being prayed over on the floor of the General Assembly.

HP: *What would you like to be sure the Presbytery knows about the PC(USA)?*

MH: The GA is proactive about the loss of membership and revenue and is downsizing staff in order to balance budgets. It is keeping pace with cultural challenges and is still supporting missions, social justice, ecology, hunger, and racial diversity in membership.

EK: I want to make sure our little presbytery knows that the GA actually is trying to move us forward and not stay stuck in the past. And how we adopted a new confession that wasn't written by, and I quote, "Old white European men."

BK: The Presbyterian Mission agency is doing a ton of mission work in the United States and overseas. But the only thing we seem to know about them is their budget went up again. Our presbytery's world view of GA is that is just about overtures and social mission statements. But that is dealt with for only 2 weeks every two years. The rest of the time in between, we are doing Presbyterian Disaster Relief, doing local and world missions, and even putting on an evangelism conference in Florida this August.