

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have served as a commissioner to GA this year, so thank you to all of you in Heartland Presbytery for giving me that opportunity and trusting me with that responsibility! This was my first time attending GA, and I found it almost overwhelming in a variety of ways – there were people there from so many different chapters in my life; there was so much to see and do and hear about; there was so much going on that you could choose or choose not to get involved in.

It was really wonderful to see so many different facets of the church, to encounter so many people working together to serve God and God's people in so many different ways, to learn about organizations and groups that I had no idea existed but are part of the fabric of our wider church family. I learned so much in so many different arenas – there were aspects of our system and process that I had just never really encountered or thought about; there were issues and discussions that had never really touched my life or ministry before so I hadn't had the opportunity to hear about them or engage with them; there were ideas and questions that seemed simple and straightforward at first but became much less simple and clear as discussions grew and they were unpacked more fully.

Overall, I would say that my big-picture takeaway from GA is a newfound and slightly different sense of appreciation for our Presbyterian process. Though I considered myself to be someone with a good knowledge of polity and our church structure and system, and though I had watched the live stream of GA plenary sessions in years past, I saw it all with new eyes being there in person and as a commissioner. I felt a sense of responsibility that I didn't necessarily anticipate. Of course I knew that being a commissioner carried a great deal of responsibility, but I didn't expect to feel that weighing on me quite as much as it did in the moment of being there. It matters that we – ordinary people who love the church – were given the authority to make decisions on so many things from money, to theological statements, to public commentary on social issues, to the future direction of the church. It was not always easy; it was not always straightforward; I didn't always vote the way I initially had thought I would, and I didn't always vote with the majority. But there was an overall sense of gravity and importance to the affirmation that we were all doing the best we could to discern and pray and trust in the Holy Spirit as we moved forward and made all these decisions. It bothered me more than I thought it would to hear comments, whether in person or on the internet, expressing anger or disappointment or cynicism about the decisions that were made at GA. Though I have admittedly been one of those voices in the past, it felt very different to me to be on the other side this year and to be part of the decision-making body, where, even if I had not agreed with the way the vote had gone, I felt that I had to hope and trust that God would still be at work and would still be doing something with the decisions that had been made.

I was left with a desire and a hope for trust in our system – trust that God will be with and equip the people we choose to give responsibility to, trust that those individuals will do their homework and live up to the responsibility that the body entrusts them with, trust that even when we disagree with decisions that are made, even when we hope things will go differently the next time around, even when the process seems impossibly slow, that God is still doing something in and through and with our work as the church together. And I am left with the desire and hope that that perspective can rise to the surface in our work as congregations and as a presbytery, so that we can trust one another more, so we can recapture a sense of our own responsibility in answering God's call, so we can recapture that sense of gravity in working together to do our best to discern and pray and follow the Holy Spirit, and so that we can see where God is still at work in our midst and through our process.