

223rd General Assembly of Presbyterian Church (USA) St. Louis, Missouri

Rev. Dr. Edward J. Thompson

August 2018

I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to Heartland Presbytery for affording me the opportunity to serve as a Commissioner to the 223rd General Assembly. Thanks also to the presbytery staff for their encouragement and care for our work both in preparation and during the week in St. Louis.

My soul was enriched and enlarged by the beauty of the opening worship, laden with images of “river and water” as we gathered close to the Mississippi River. Throughout the week the current of these images gathered us and scattered us in the name of Christ in the work we did and the breath we breathed.

It is good to be reminded that the church, as the body of Christ, is larger, deeper, and higher than the week to week gathering of which we are part. I was grateful for the music and the musings of the opening and closing of business each day. Morning and evening we heard from ecumenical partners and Young Adult Advisers who offered words of testimony and prayers of engagement.

“Decently and in Order” was how the election of our new co-moderators took place and I add that “decently and in order” was how the Assembly functioned throughout the week. Technology worked despite at times our best efforts as Commissioners to mess it up! If only we could spend a little less time discussing process and just proceed! Alas!

The act of public witness made a difference to many. We trust and pray it made a difference to some who were awaiting trial in a system that keeps them incarcerated until they can meet bail. It certainly made a difference to the Commissioners who had opportunity to be united in calling for justice.

Although the “committee work” of the Assembly has the potential of becoming unwieldy due to the size of committees, usually between 50 -60 commissioners in each such committee, my experience as a member of Committee 13 -Middle East Affairs - proved that it can work and we can work together. I learned a lot during our time in committee work and for that I am thankful.

Debates both in committee and in plenary were infused with passion and commitment and although not every decision reached was unanimous there was a spirit of unanimity that carries this work forward and onward from GA to Presbytery, from Presbytery to Sessions and throughout the church large and small.

In the opening worship the words of Joshua 1 set the context for the week – “After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua saying, My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan...Be strong and courageous do not be frightened or dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go...”

I urge you as members of Heartland Presbytery to search out the actions endorsed by this Assembly and to be encouraged that our church is engaged in the life of our world whether that be around the corner or around the globe. Be encouraged that we have partners in this work with one another and with congregations and reformed denominations throughout the world. Be strong and courageous....

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