



General Assembly Detroit, MI June 14 -21, 2014

For more than a week in June, Littlefielders were very involved in the hospitality efforts of the Presbytery of Detroit, the Presbytery of Lake Huron and the Presbytery of Lake Michigan to welcome commissioners, advisory delegates and visitors to Detroit from all over the world who attended the 221st General Assembly. For most it was the first opportunity to see what the General Assembly is all about.

While the General Assembly (GA) now happens on a biennial basis, planning for this major event of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) takes several years and thousands of volunteers. Not only is the GA the biennial business meeting, it is the family reunion with many coming to observe the church at work and to meet with friends and colleagues from across the country.

Many Littlefielders responded to the request to volunteer during the GA in a myriad of opportunities: serve communion; dance or sing during a worship service; meet and greet guests at the airport; coordinate the love offering of school supplies brought by commissioners and guests for Detroit area projects; help with the luncheon after Sunday worship at Littlefield where more than 30 GA guests attended; welcome folks and give directions to and within Cobo Center; help set up wiring and digital equipment in the plenary hall; assist at the Pal Craftaid booth and more. Many spent most of the week downtown helping in some way.



Many important decisions were made by the commissioners to the 221st GA. The Presbytery of Detroit was represented by 8 commissioners (4 teaching elders and 4 ruling elders) nominated and elected by the



presbytery plus 1 young adult advisory delegate. The number of commissioners is determined by the number of communicant members within the presbytery; every presbytery has at least one teaching elder and one ruling elder commissioner. Each commissioner is elected by the presbytery but is not delegated to vote in a particular way; each is to be guided by the debate, their study of the issues prior to the GA and the Holy Spirit at the time of each vote. Advisory delegates (young adults, theological, missionary and ecumenical/interfaith) have voice and vote within the committee process and voice on the floor of the plenary sessions. Being a commissioner or advisory delegate to the GA is a big and important responsibility.

For many commissioners and visitors, it was their first visit to Detroit. Over the last several years, they have been bombarded by news of bankruptcy, corruption, crime, and emergency managers so first impressions were important. Everyone was greeted by smiling faces as they arrived at the airport, went to their hotels and came to Cobo Center. They definitely left Detroit with new and different opinions after a week of friendly greetings, a vibrant downtown area, beautiful Cobo Center, the river walk, the changing water colors on the Detroit River and much more.

Several Littlefielders shared brief thoughts about their GA experience:

- **Trudy McCreadie:** "It was an honor to be one of the liturgical dancers at the opening worship service. What a privilege to be there to share in the prayerful preparation of the commissioners! By volunteering to





help at the Pal Craftaid booth, I was able to observe the displays of the PCUSA and our many affiliated organizations.

By volunteering to serve communion for three days, I was very inspired by the sermons and worship services. I feel blessed to be part of the Presbyterian Church (USA)."

- **Sharon Cloney:** "Being at GA was a great experience, where I learned so much about the causes supported by the church. I was especially surprised by the Jewish groups who supported the divestment from Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions and Hewlett-Packard.

I also enjoyed working with the group that cleaned the Pewabic chalices and plates after communion and selling Pal Craftaid items. All in all, I'm glad I was able to be a small part of GA."

- **Ron Stockton:** "The thing that most impressed me was the Moderator election. Carol Hylkema had told Jane that this was often the single best event of the week so we decided to stay (even though it was delayed and delayed because of voting mix ups). I was so glad we waited around. The way the three candidates answered the questions from the floor was very impressive. I was super impressed with Heath Rada and was very happy when he was chosen. He is a person of spiritual and intellectual depth."



- **Nancy Hess:** "It was a great experience for me (as a first time attendee) between welcoming people at the airport and making sure they got to the right hotels, to greeting people at Cobo Hall, experiencing the opening worship service and then helping sell Pal Craftaid.



Whoever convinced me to volunteer, thank you.

- **Jane Stockton:** "I was proud to be working in the Pal Craftaid booth. It was fun to be in that room with all the representatives from so many organizations. The items in our booth were beautiful, and people were delighted to be buying them, because of their intrinsic quality and also the belief that their purchases helped
- **Ben Hylkema:** "What a wonderful, terrible idea. People came from all over forewarned about how bad it could be. Then they were amazed at the good in the people of Detroit and the beauty and activity in the downtown area."
- **Jim McCreadie:** I enjoyed the bus opportunity on Sunday. We left Littlefield much earlier than I expected. So, I had the opportunity to take the folks



on a mini tour of the neighborhood, thanks to our bus driver and the microphone system aboard. There were questions about our relationship with the Arab community. I told them about our Peace camp and that the families of the children were comfortable with their children in the church - that we had developed that kind of trust. They were surprised to hear about our inter-faith worship.

We went west on Warren past all the shops all the way to Greenfield, down Greenfield to Ford Road, then west past "worship row". Many had never seen a House of Knowledge in person. They didn't know the Mosque was a place to pray in the complex. We also say some of the Ford buildings before traveling down Michigan Ave. toward I-94 toward the city.

- **Carol Hylkema:** "For me, the GA is about a lot of things as I've become a GA junkie over the years. Pal Craftaid had a great sale and my issues were decided positively. However, the best part is seeing



friends and colleagues from across the country and getting many hugs and trying to find time to catch up with these friends.”

Many awards were given out during the General Assembly. Some of those in which Littlefield members were involved were the following:

- Littlefield Church received one of the two congregation awards for “Social Righteousness” from **Presbyterian Voices for Justice** (a recent merger of the former Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia). Fran Hayes, Pam Moore and Carol Hylkema were on hand at the Fort Street Church to receive the award on Sunday afternoon.
- Carol Hylkema chaired the **Women of Faith** Selection Committee and Breakfast. Among the three awardees was Helen Morrison of the Grosse Ile Church who has been Carol’s mentor for 20+ years.
- The Israel Palestine Mission Network (IPMN) and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) were jointly given the **Presbyterian Peace Fellowship** Peace Seeker Award for 2013 at breakfast on Wednesday. Carol Hylkema, past IPMN moderator, Katherine Cunningham, current IPMN moderator and Sydney Levy of JVP received the award.



Without a doubt, Littlefield’s participation in the GA was far beyond the percentage of members from most other churches. Everyone learned a lot and some may begin to follow more closely the work of the wider church. Maybe someone will even be interested in applying to be a Detroit commissioner to the 222nd GA in Portland, OR in June 2016.

