

June 30, 2008

To the Presbytery of Charlotte

From Sam Roberson, General Presbyter/Stated Clerk

Regarding the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

Your awesome Presbytery of Charlotte Commissioners worked faithfully...long and hard...during the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. They were not always of one mind, but they embodied the Holy Spirit on your behalf at this General Assembly. Your Commissioners will be available for conversation and discussion an hour and a half prior to the July 15<sup>th</sup> Presbytery meeting at Bethel Presbyterian Church. They will also make a 20-30 minute presentation during the Presbytery meeting.

The 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly did not alter constitutional standards, redefine marriage, or do anything else outside the appropriate purview of a General Assembly. Following the Presbytery of Charlotte's year of discernment around the Peace, Purity, and Unity Report and CPM's and COM's careful assessments of the practices and standards they will use with candidates and Ministers of Word and Sacrament, there should be continuity in the standards and practices of the Presbytery of Charlotte in the foreseeable future. However, to suggest that the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly was business as usual would be anything but the truth.

Everything about the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly pointed to the PCUSA of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not all agree, not all embrace the directions this General Assembly headed. Most PCUSA leaders acknowledge: this General Assembly constituted a watershed event. A new Form of Government referred for study, a Task Force on Youth(made up mostly of youth), a General Assembly Council/Presbyterian Foundation corporate compromise, contested Authoritative Interpretations of the Constitution, the election of a Moderator with an aversion for neckties, the election of a new Stated Clerk following 12 years of Cliff Kirkpatrick's leadership, a correction of a creed and a new creedal proposal, an alternative version of G.6106b, a revised sexuality curriculum, continued attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, debate on the Iraqi war with special pastoral attention to the needs of soldiers, families, and veterans: all engaged the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

I've been attending General Assemblies for more than twenty years. For the most part, this was a non-anxious General Assembly. Seldom have I observed a General Assembly so keenly seeking the Holy Spirit. Never have I seen a General Assembly less influenced by interest groups. Like what they did or said...or not...this General Assembly discerned their faithful responses to the overtures and issues before them. They were very Presbyterian!

As a seasoned General Assembly observer, two things stood out for me. First, even when matters were controversial, commissioners did not cry, shout, name call, walk out, or

demonstrate. There may have been an exception here and there, but I've been to many General Assemblies where such behaviors were commonplace. Second, historically, the votes of General Assembly Commissioners have mirrored the advice of Youth Advisory Delegates, Theological Student Advisory Delegates, Missionary Advisory Delegates, and Ecumenical Advisory Delegates. The same pattern was evident in this General Assembly with a big exception. Youth Advisory Delegates and Theological Student Advisory Delegates generally voted 10-25% ahead of the direction the General Assembly Commissioners voted. On perhaps the most difficult decision of the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, the Commissioners split 54-46%, the Youth Advisory Delegates and the Theological Advisory Delegates voted closer to 70-30%.

Many came away from the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly encouraged and excited. Many also left disheartened and dissatisfied. To be honest, I came away concerned that my job just got more challenging. From all sides, calls sounded and spirits pleaded for staying together in the unity of Christ, notwithstanding genuine, significant differences. I affirm and join that call and plea!

I pray the clergy and congregations of the Presbytery of Charlotte will join the cry and plea for unity in Christ, will continue to support and work with one another, and will witness to the world through our lives that we Presbyterians are moving together with Christ into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.