

Pastor Katherine Scott-Kirschner's Thoughts on GA 225

I had the pleasure of being one of our Presbytery's Teaching Elder Commissioners at the 225th General Assembly. This GA was different than all others in the denomination's past. It was a hybrid event – and it took over 3 weeks of the summer (in June and July). All the committees met in person in Louisville, KY at the PC(USA) headquarters over two weeks.

I was assigned to the Bills and Overtures Committee, which assists the State Clerks with producing the docket for each plenary (group) session. I was in Louisville for the beginning of the assembly and being in person was a great joy for me. I'm so glad there was an in-person component to this year's GA. This was my first time attending GA, so I had nothing to compare it to, but I can tell a full in-person GA would be a very exhausting and exhilarating time.

Plenary sessions 4-17 (from July 5th through July 9th) were all done virtually over Zoom and using a voting system created for the General Assembly. This virtual existence worked but left some room for improvement. Overall, I would say the Assembly did a great job working through some heavy topics for consideration. And there will be several overtures (items of business) that will be sent to the Presbyteries for their approval. And if 2/3 of the Presbyteries approve of any of the overtures, they'll become part of the Book of Order (BoO).

Here are some of the overture highlights (from my perspective – and not in any specific order):

1. It was decided that GA 226 in 2024 will be the opposite of this one: the committee work will be online, and the plenary will be in person (in Salt Lake City, UT).
2. An overture mandating Family Medical Leave was approved to be sent to the Presbyteries to add a provision for at least 12 weeks paid leave in Minister of Word and Sacrament's Terms of Call. Our Presbytery already mandates this. There were additional overtures that added more specific trainings to keep Ministers of Word and Sacrament in good standing – such as anti-racism, sexual misconduct, and domestic violence trainings.
3. Several task forces were created to look at specific issue and topics, including adding another Confession to the Book of Confessions.
4. There was an overture that approved an apology on behalf of the denomination to African Americans and the Sin of Slavery.
5. There was also an overture that denounced antisemitism and Islamophobia.
6. One of the sections in the BoO is currently called "Rules of Discipline (ROD)" and a previous GA had created a ROD task force to rethink this portion of the BoO. Their work was presented and was approved (after a few amendments) to replace that entire portion of the BoO. The presbyteries will make the final decision for this replacement to take effect.
7. It was approved to create a Commission with the express power of unifying the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) and the Office of General Assembly (OGA). This was a very big topic of conversation for people employed by these two entities. This overture was introduced by a special committee that clearly articulated the need for a commission to be able to move and change things without waiting another two years. This commission will have a large amount of work ahead of them to provide a more stable financial future for the denominational leadership of our church.

8. Alongside the Commission to unify, there is also going to be a special committee to create a new funding model to move away from Per Capita. Our Presbytery Leader, Rev. Jeanne Radak has been instrumental to this process already.
9. There were other overtures that rocked the boat politically– such as an overture to denounce the harmful treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank; an overture about reproductive justice; and an overture about gun violence.