



June 25, 2006

To Presbyterian Church (USA) congregations

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Lectionary Psalm for today is Psalm 133: How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

As the 217th General Assembly met together in Birmingham, it was remarkable to see Presbyterians from north, south, east, and west gathered together to discern the mind of Christ for the Presbyterian Church (USA). We witnessed the work of the Spirit in and through the assembly, giving us a glimpse of our visible oneness in Jesus Christ. We give thanks that the assembly theme, "So Great a Cloud of Witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) permeated the community of faith within the convention center.

In this meeting, we saw commissioners and advisory delegates living out in word and deed their deep commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, their passion to be living expressions of Christ's love to the world, and their eagerness to be a part of the future God intends for the PC(USA). We experienced the Presbyterian process of doing things at its best. We observed people working fairly and treating each other graciously.

This assembly dealt with hundreds of items, and a few made headlines across the country. Most likely, you have read or will read about the assembly's actions from a number of sources over the next many days and weeks, but we want you to hear about this important gathering directly from the General Assembly. That is why we are writing this letter to you.

We know of three particular decisions that made immediate headlines. Here is what the assembly did with each of them:

- Israel/Palestine issues: This General Assembly acknowledged that the actions of the 2004 assembly caused hurt and misunderstanding among some Presbyterians and our Jewish neighbors. However, this assembly did not rescind the previous action on divestment. Divestment is still an option, but not the goal. Instead, this assembly broadened the focus to corporate engagement to ensure that the church's financial investments do not support violence of any kind in the region.
- Report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church: With the approval of this report, the assembly did not alter our historic standards for ordination. However, it did make clear that more responsibility is to be exercised by sessions and presbyteries regarding the examination of candidates for ordination. By an overwhelming majority, the assembly also affirmed our covenantal partnership, our common theological roots, and the need for prayer in Christian communities as we make decisions.
- The Trinity: The assembly received a paper that affirms "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" as the church's primary language for the Trinity. The paper also lifts up other biblical images of the Trinity for study and use in worship.

We hope, over the months ahead, you will hear about the other items that did not make headlines—new church development, Christian education, evangelism, older adult ministries, homelessness, globalization, international mission, multicultural issues, disability awareness, and military chaplains, to name a few. It was obvious to us that this assembly, like the church, had deep differences on a number of issues. But, the longer we were together, the more we realized how much we have in common in Jesus Christ—and the more we realized we need one another.

The unity we seek for the church — and the unity we experienced at the assembly — is not just about coming to an agreement. It is also about being with each other in the healthy struggle to discern God's will. It was that healthy struggle we witnessed at the assembly, and in that struggle we were blessed. God's Spirit was with us. Not everyone will like what the commissioners did, but the spirit coming out of the assembly was something we think will be a blessing to the whole church.

Indeed, we are convinced that God has a future for the Presbyterian Church (USA). We invite you to join us as we move with renewed enthusiasm to doing God's work in the world.

Yours in Christ,

The Reverend Joan S. Gray
Moderator of the 217th General Assembly (2006) of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA)