Who’s in the Room: Key People and Roles

Many people attend General Assembly in service to the Lord. This course gives an overview of key people and the roles they play.

About this Course

Commissioners and Advisory Delegates

Leadership at the Assembly

Volunteers at the Assembly

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About this Course

Welcome! This course is part of the 223rd General Assembly (2018) Commissioner Pre-Assembly Training offered by the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Course Objectives

This course covers the following aspects of General Assembly:

- Commissioners and Advisory Delegates
- Leadership at the Assembly
- Volunteers at the Assembly

About Your Trainer

Your trainer for this course is the Reverend Dr. Thomas Hay. Tom has been with the OGA since January of 2009. Before coming to work at the OGA, he served as the general presbyter for the Presbytery of Shenandoah in western Virginia and portions of West Virginia, and served pastorates in Buchanan (Virginia), Wallace (North Carolina), and Bristol (Virginia).
Commissioners and Advisory Delegates

Commissioners and advisory delegates are a critical part of each General Assembly. It’s important that everyone has a clear understanding of their role.

About Commissioners

The Book of Order says that an assembly shall consist of equal number of ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elected by the presbyteries and reflective of the diversity within their bounds [G-3.0501]. The Book of Order then goes on to say how many commissioners represent each presbytery according to size, beginning with one ruling elder and one minister for presbyteries with 8,000 or fewer members, and increasing the number of commissioners by increments of 8,000 presbytery members.
• There will be 538 commissioners to the 223rd General Assembly (2018).
• This represents a decrease of 56 commissioners from the previous General Assembly and reflects the number of presbyteries whose membership has declined over the last two years.
• A report showing how many commissioners each presbytery will be sending to GA 223 is made available spring 2018.

About Advisory Delegates

For much of the last 100 years, the assembly has seen the wisdom of inviting others to the table who can offer their voice and wisdom to the deliberations. Advisory Delegates, according to the Standing Rules of the General Assembly, attend the meeting “so that the assembly may be assured of hearing and taking cognizance of their special viewpoints” [Standing Rule B.2.a].

Like commissioners, advisory delegates have voice and vote in committee. However, in the plenary sessions advisory delegates only have voice. It is common in plenary, though, for the Moderators to poll the advisory delegates before important votes so that they can advise the commissioners on how they might vote on a particular issue.
Four Types of Advisory Delegates

Young Adult Advisory Delegates (YAADs) are between the ages of 17 and 23. Each presbytery can elect a YAAD and so they represent the largest block of advisory delegates.

Theological School Advisory Delegates (TSADs) are candidates or inquirers under care of a presbytery and have at least one year post-assembly before graduating from a graduate theological institution. TSADs to the 223rd General Assembly (2018) apply to the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) in the fall of 2017. From these applicants, fifteen are chosen to reflect the diversity of the church with an emphasis on ensuring strong representation from our PC(USA) seminaries.

Eight Missionary Advisory Delegates (MADs) are chosen by the World Missions ministry of the Presbyterian Mission Agency from the mission personnel assigned in other countries.

Each assembly will invite fifteen Ecumenical Advisory Delegates (EADs) to attend the next assembly from churches in our country and throughout the world.
Leadership at the Assembly

An assembly without capable leadership would be at the whim of whoever has the loudest voice or is most skillful at manipulating the rules. For this reason, General Assemblies assign some of their members to roles of leadership for service to the church and future assemblies.

Moderator or Co-Moderators

On the first day of the meeting, each assembly chooses its own Moderator or Co-Moderators who will preside over the assembly. In the language of the Standing Rules, each Moderator “possess the authority necessary for preserving order and for conducting efficiently the business of the council” [H.1.a.(6)].

In the months preceding the assembly, commissioners will announce that they intend to stand for Moderator (or Co-Moderator). Information about them will be sent to each commissioner a few weeks before the assembly. The Saturday evening election includes speeches by the candidates and a question and answer period. Their work begins immediately after the election.

You can read more about the election process in the Standing Rules and watch a video of the whole process from 2016.

Stated Clerk

The *Book of Order* states that each council shall elect a clerk, and that the clerk of a presbytery, synod, or assembly is called a **Stated Clerk**. The 222nd General Assembly (2016) elected J. Herbert Nelson, II, to a four-year term as Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. The Stated Clerk is responsible for making the arrangements for the assembly, ensuring good order for the processing of business, and also serves as parliamentarian during the meeting.

The Stated Clerk also nominates to the assembly certain other ministers and ruling elders to serve as Associate Stated Clerks. These men and women (there are currently four) assist in supporting the Stated Clerk’s role.
Corresponding Members

Also offering leadership at the assembly are ministers and ruling elders who, by virtue of their office, are identified as **Corresponding Members** of the assembly. They are former Moderators, seminary presidents, heads of the church’s agencies, synod executives, and others. Corresponding members are entitled to speak to items of business directly related to their work, but may not vote [Standing Rule B.3].

*Reverend Larissa Kwong Abazia, Vice-Moderator of the 221st General Assembly (2014).*
Committee Leadership

Each assembly committee also needs leadership. As these committees are often quite large, they are more like a meeting of a presbytery than a typical committee meeting. For this reason, the Standing Rules allow the Moderator (or Co-Moderators) of the last assembly to appoint a **moderator and vice moderator to each committee**. Ordinarily these are commissioners to the current assembly, but may be experienced commissioners from a recent assembly [Standing Rule C.1.c.].

*Committee leadership presents during an assembly Plenary.*
Volunteers at the Assembly

No assembly can work without hundreds of volunteers. They carry a huge burden for processing the business, enabling the work of commissioners, planning and executing worship, and bringing hospitality.

Assembly registration is a hub of activity.
Assembly Assistants

The Stated Clerk is authorized to appoint Assembly Assistants who carry out a wide variety of functions. While their expenses to the assembly are paid, they take time away from their other jobs in the secular world or as presbytery staff, pastors, educators, or other church-related work. Many sacrifice vacation time to serve the assembly.

Assembly assistants serve as parliamentarians, assistants, and recorders in committees. Some will be seen tracking each item of business to ensure that none are lost. Assembly assistants provide interpretation services and make sure that each speaker’s name is projected on the plenary screens. Nothing as large as an assembly could happen without assembly assistants.

Local Arrangements

The second large group of volunteers are from the Committee on Local Arrangements (COLA), which is appointed by the host presbytery. From the moment commissioners arrive at the airport, COLA volunteers are there to help each one feel welcome and comfortable in St. Louis. COLA volunteers organize the daily worship services and plan for Sunday morning worship in local congregations along with countless other opportunities. They have been at work for two years in anticipation of the General Assembly coming to St. Louis.

It has often been said that Presbyterians can have a meeting without a COLA, but not an assembly. You will soon learn to identify the COLA volunteers and when you see them, trust that all is okay.

Student Assistants

Another important group of volunteers are Student Assistants. This team of mostly seminary students, give their week to helping with technology support. You will see them in each committee walking someone through problems with PC-Biz, at each plenary handing out voting handsets, and in a dozen other important positions.

J. Herbert Nelson, II, was once a student assistant at an assembly. This experience has been an important service to the assembly and has provided leadership to the church for years to come.
The stage and floor of an assembly.

Attachments

Standing Rules of the General Assembly

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