

REGISTRATION INFORMATION AND TRAVEL EXPENSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR COMMISSIONERS AND ADVISORY DELEGATES

Please read this information about your assembly responsibilities and arrangements carefully before you make your travel and housing arrangements. These procedures and policies have been developed in the interest of good stewardship, and to provide fairly for the comfort and convenience of assembly commissioners and advisory delegates. Contact the G.A. Meeting Service of the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) at 800-728-7228, ext. 2417 or gameetingservice@pcusa.org with any questions or concerns. Please see <https://ga-pcusa.org> for additional information and resources.

Your Role and Responsibility

Please take time to become acquainted with the responsibilities of the General Assembly (*Book of Order*, G-3.0501), and to read the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity (chapters F-1 to F-3 of the *Book of Order*), which outline the principles of our representative form of government. “Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ.” (F-3.0204). Assembly commissioners are free to deliberate together, seek Christ's will, and by majority vote reach decisions on the business before them. Commissioners may not be instructed on how to vote nor on what positions to support. They are not the representatives of the people that elected them, but instead they represent the “. . . unity of the synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).” (G-3.0501)

Advisory delegates “are selected to attend the meeting of the General Assembly in an advisory role so that the assembly may be assured of hearing and taking cognizance of their special viewpoints.” (Standing Rule A.2.a.). Though advisory delegates do not have the privilege of voting on business in the assembly business meetings, they have other opportunities to make their views known. They participate in the debates in business sessions, and are polled prior to the votes on many issues to determine their advice. In the assembly committees, advisory delegates have both voice and vote – just as commissioners do.

Young Adult Advisory Delegates (YAADs) and Theological Student Advisory Delegates (TSADSs) are seated with the commissioners from their presbytery in the plenary hall. Missionary Advisory Delegates (MADs) and Ecumenical Advisory Delegates (EADs) have assigned seating in the commissioner/advisory delegate area.

Where and When

Most assembly meetings will be held at the America’s Center in downtown St. Louis, Missouri, or in one of the nearby hotels.

The assembly convenes with Opening Worship at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 16, and will adjourn by noon on Saturday, June 23. You are expected to attend all sessions.

Most commissioners will travel to St. Louis on Friday, and assembly registration opens that day.

The presbytery’s Committee on Local Arrangements (COLA) invites all assembly participants to its Meet Me in St. Louis reception, scheduled for Friday, June 15, from 5:00 – 8:00 p.m. in the convention center.

Advisory Delegate Orientations: An orientation for YAADs will begin at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 14. It is conducted by assembly assistants who serve as advisors for the YAADs throughout the assembly. YAADs should plan to travel to St. Louis on Thursday, June 14 (arriving by 5:00 p.m.), and their lodging expenses are covered from that night.

Orientations for TSADs and MADs start with at 6:30 p.m. Friday, June 15; TSADs and MADs should plan to travel on Friday and arrive in St. Louis in time to attend.

The full Schedule of Events is available at <http://ga-pcusa.org>. It includes the docket of official meetings, assembly worship, and information on numerous optional activities. Please review this *before* you start to register.

Travel, Registration and Lodging

How to Register: When assembly registration opens, you will receive an email from the G.A. Meeting Service with instructions and a link to on-line registration for the assembly. This is how you will confirm your plans to attend and reserve lodging in one of the assembly hotels. This is a unique link for your registration that recognizes that you are a commissioner or advisory delegate. *Please be sure to use this link - do NOT use the “generic” registration link at the GA web site.* Do NOT forward your email/link to anyone else.

Please complete your travel arrangements and registration by *April 16*. The Office of the General Assembly (OGA) has made arrangements with Balboa Travel and seven hotels in downtown St. Louis to make this easy and cost effective.

Contact the G.A. Meeting Service at 800-728-7228, ext. 2417 with questions about or problems with assembly registration or booking travel.

Families: Spouses/partners and children are welcome as assembly observers, at their expense. You may reserve a double room when you register. The assembly covers one-half the hotel room charge for commissioners and advisory delegates; if you are accompanied by your spouse/partner/family, you are responsible for paying the hotel directly for their half of the room charge.

All observers, including spouses, who wish to observe the business meetings must register and have an assembly name badge to access the hall (except on Saturday, June 16, when badges are *not* required for visitors observing the afternoon and evening sessions). A badge is *not* required to visit the exhibit hall, participate in worship, or observe the assembly committee meetings. You may register your spouse/partner as an observer (\$95 advance registration fee) when you register yourself. Or you may use the “Guest” registration feature to purchase tickets to meals or other activities for a spouse, other family members, or friends who are not registering in advance. Anyone who does not need or want to make a reservation in one of the assembly hotels through the G.A. Meeting Service may register on-site (starting Friday, June 15). The on-site registration fee is \$30, and it is waived for those for whom it is a financial hardship.

Travel to St. Louis

Please consider both cost and convenience as you plan how you will travel to St. Louis.

Air Travel: Commissioners and advisory delegates will receive an email (separate from the registration email and link from the G.A. Meeting Service) with instructions for booking travel and a link to an on-line booking tool that enables airfare to be charged directly to the assembly through Balboa Travel, the designated assembly travel agency. Travelers may also call an agent to book their travel. *Tickets booked through another travel agent or directly with an airline are not reimbursable.*

Make your travel arrangements soon (*by April 16*) for the best fares and choice of flights. *To avoid the highest fares, the OGA limits payment for airfares to the 30-day advance-purchase amount.*

The OGA pays for travel between your home and St. Louis at the lowest logical main cabin round trip fare. If you request a more expensive itinerary (a direct flight with a higher fare, a stopover in another city, etc.) you are responsible for paying the additional amount, as calculated by the GA travel agent.

Most fares are non-refundable, with hefty fees for changes. *Be sure of your schedule and the accuracy of the reservation when you book your ticket.* The OGA will pay for or reimburse change fees or new tickets *only* when the assembly requires the travel change.

By Train: St. Louis is served by Amtrak (amtrak.com) which may be convenient and cost effective for some. The Amtrak station is located in downtown St. Louis, about 1.2 miles from the convention center. Train fares are reimbursable, up to the equivalent of the lowest logical airfare (as determined by Balboa Travel). Upgraded Amtrak services (sleeper cars, etc.) are not reimbursable.

By Car: Those who choose to drive to St. Louis rather than taking reasonably available commercial travel options (plane, train, etc.) are reimbursed for:

- mileage (at the IRS rate in effect over the assembly dates)
- meals enroute (up to \$30 per day)
- lodging enroute (up to \$70 per night plus tax)
- parking charges in St. Louis (up to \$15/day)

Receipts are required for meal, lodging and parking expenses. *If this total exceeds the air/train fare that you and commissioners/ advisory delegates who are your passengers would incur, reimbursement is limited to the equivalent of the lowest logical air/train fare(s), as determined by the assembly travel agency.*

Drivers who live near enough to St. Louis that commercial travel is unavailable or not logical are reimbursed for mileage at the IRS rate in effect for the assembly dates, and parking charges in St. Louis (up to \$15/day – receipts required). For those staying in an assembly hotel, mileage reimbursement is limited to one round-trip between your home and downtown St. Louis. *Please help avoid unnecessary travel expenses by car-pooling with others from your area.*

Ground Transportation

The assembly will provide shuttle service between the airport and the seven assembly hotels on the peak arrival days (Thursday, June 14 and Friday, June 15) and between the convention center and the airport on the peak departure date (Saturday, June 23).

For those arriving at other days/times, options include:

- Metrolink - \$4 one-way
- GO BEST Express - \$45 per person, round trip
- Taxi - about \$40 one-way between the airport and downtown.

More information about these arrangements and options will be sent to all registered attendees well in advance.

Car rental and other ground transportation expenses in St. Louis are generally *not* reimbursable.

Assembly Lodging

The seven assembly hotels are located in downtown St. Louis, within walking distance of the convention center. Complete your assembly registration as soon as possible - *by April 16* - to reserve lodging in one of these hotels. Your allowable room and tax charges at these properties are paid directly by the Office of the General Assembly.

Reimbursement is NOT available for charges incurred for staying in other hotels, Airbnb or other alternative lodgings, etc. Those who stay at home, with family or friends, etc. and commute will be reimbursed for mileage (not to exceed \$30/day) and parking (not to exceed \$15/day).

Accommodations in assembly hotels are paid for at the *shared rate* of *one-half* the hotel room rate, plus tax. If you share a room with another commissioner or advisory delegate, both your share and your roommate's share of the room charge are paid by the assembly, and you should not have out-of-pocket lodging costs unless you stay beyond the meeting dates. *If you request a single room, or if you share a room with your spouse/family or any other participant whose charges are not covered by a GA agency, only your half of the room cost is covered by the assembly, and you (or your roommate) will pay the hotel for the other half, plus tax.*

Roommates: If you want to share a room but do not have a roommate, the G.A. Meeting Service can assist. If you would like us to select a roommate for you, indicate this when you register.

If you select your own roommate, fill in his/her name when you register. *Make sure that he/she registers as early as possible and lists you as the roommate. The reservation is not made until both registrations are complete.*

You will pay the full room cost for any nights your roommate does not share the room, so choose a roommate with the same arrival and departure dates as yours to avoid incurring those additional costs.

Length of Stay: For commissioners, TSADs, and MADs, lodging is covered for up to 8 nights (from Friday, June 15, through Friday night, June 22). Lodging for Thursday, June 14, is covered for young adult advisory delegates attending the YAAD orientation that begins at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday.

Charges for additional nights are at your expense, and the G.A. Meeting Service cannot guarantee the availability of rooms at the assembly hotel at the GA rates for those additional nights.

If you drive to St. Louis, hotel charges prior to Friday, June 15 or after the night of Friday, June 22 are considered a driving expense. Include these with related costs on your expense voucher. These are reimbursable provided the total (mileage, parking, lodging and meal costs en route) is still less than the lowest logical airfare, as determined by the assembly travel agency.

Payment and deposit: While the assembly budget covers your allowable hotel room charges, *you will need a major credit card or a cash deposit (\$200 or more) upon arrival at your hotel as a deposit* to cover any room charges for which you are responsible, and potential incidental charges such as meals and phone calls. If you use a debit card for this purpose, the hotel will put a hold on the deposit amount so it will be unavailable until after you depart.

Meals in St. Louis

Commissioners and advisory delegates receive tickets to the six group meals at no charge; these will appear as pre-checked activities as you register on-line.

On Sunday, June 17, many congregations in the St. Louis area will welcome assembly participants to worship with them, and host them for lunch. Transportation is provided from the convention center. Please sign up to visit one of these churches as you register - advance registration is necessary to plan for transportation and lunch.

Other meals are covered with the assembly per diem of \$53 (\$13-breakfast, \$13-lunch, \$27-dinner). The per diem begins with dinner on Friday, June 15 and ends with lunch on Saturday, June 23. When you check in on-site you will receive a credit card with a pre-set limit equivalent to the per diem amount for the length of your stay. It can be used at the convention center concession areas, hotel restaurants, and most other restaurants in the area.

Three of the assembly hotels (the Drury Inn, Embassy Suites, and Hampton Inn) include a full breakfast in the rate. The breakfast per diem will be adjust off for commissioners and advisory delegates staying at any of those properties.

Assembly agencies and other organizations sponsor optional events before and during the assembly for those interested in learning more about their ministry and work. Most are scheduled over a meal break so that commissioners and advisory delegates may participate; many are ticketed meal events that involve a fee. These tickets can be purchased as you complete your assembly registration. Your per diem cannot be used in advance to purchase tickets to these optional meals; if you wish to participate in any of those, you will pay that cost by credit card or electronic check. Please review the *Schedule of Events* before you begin that process.

Some events - including most of the mission tours - coincide with assembly committee or business meetings; these are planned for those who are *not* required to attend all the assembly meetings.

Children at the Assembly

The General Assembly is a business meeting, with very long days and few family-oriented activities.

Commissioners and advisory delegates are in meetings from 8:30am to 9:30pm *or later* most days. Childcare options in downtown St. Louis (and most cities) are very limited, and generally open only weekdays. This makes

it challenging for those with children or other dependents to serve as commissioners/advisory delegates.

In order to ease this somewhat, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) approved a **Dependent Care policy** that applies to General Assembly commissioners and advisory delegates. It recognizes that

Providing one, limited approach (such as on-site child care) for all commissioners and advisory delegates fails to address the reality of the situation. For COGA to provide child care at the assembly during the long business days would be legally difficult while not meeting the needs of most of the commissioners and advisory delegates who require help with dependent care. It would also be contrary to the church's witness regarding the appropriate care we owe children and other dependents.

Hence, this Dependent Care Policy emphasizes a flexible approach to accommodating the variety of arrangements that some commissioners and advisory delegates may set up. For example, a commissioner or advisory delegate may decide that their situation is best accommodated with help in:

- Employment of a part-time sitter at the commissioner or advisory delegate's home or at the assembly
- The cost of care at a child or adult care center over and above that which is ordinarily incurred when the commissioner or advisory delegate is at home
- The cost of transporting a family member or other trusted person to the commissioner or advisory delegate's home or to the assembly to provide dependent care
- Additional travel, registration and/or housing costs for a dependent to attend a camp or conference above what would ordinarily occur if the commissioner or advisory delegate were not attending the assembly

Expenses for these and other eligible arrangements (as determined by the COGA) are reimbursable, up to the limit of \$800 for the first dependent, and \$400 for each additional dependent. Please review the **policy** for additional information and documentation requirements.

For those who do bring children to the General Assembly, the OGA is working with the Committee on Local Arrangements to provide for a Family Room in the convention center, open during the hours of plenary sessions and committee meetings. It will not be staffed; parents may spend time with their young child(ren) there. It will be equipped with rocking chairs, refrigerator and other appropriate furnishings and equipment.

Expense Reimbursement

As travel and hotel charges are paid directly by the assembly, and G.A. issued credit cards are used for meals on-site, most commissioners and advisory delegates will have no other expenses to claim. Those who do (for mileage, etc.) will obtain an expense reimbursement form from the treasurer on-site. Receipts are required. Reimbursement checks will be mailed following the assembly.

Training and Orientations

Please visit <https://ga-pcusa.org> frequently for more information, and to view the commissioners/advisory delegate training modules prepared by the OGA.

Most presbyteries plan an orientation session to provide an opportunity to meet with your fellow commissioners and advisory delegates, review the information you are receiving, and ask questions of those who have been through this before. Contact your presbytery office to confirm the date and time of its planned orientation.

Serving on a Committee

All commissioners and advisory delegates are assigned to one of the assembly committees by a random selection process. You will be notified of your committee assignment in March.

The assembly committees meet Sunday through Tuesday, to consider the business referred to them and develop recommendations for assembly action.

Assembly Business and PC-biz

The assembly will act on hundreds of items of business, which it receives through the reports and recommendations of various assembly entities, and through overtures from synods and presbyteries.

These reports and recommendations are available electronically, through PC-biz, the electronic system that is the primary way that participants access assembly business before, during, and after the assembly. Visit www.pc-biz.org for more information. As the reports and recommendations to the assembly are received and formatted, they are posted there. You should read as much of this material as possible before you arrive in St. Louis.

Commissioners and advisory delegates will receive an email with their PC-biz login information and instructions. Accounts will be created for those who are new to PC-biz; for those with an existing account, it will be “upgraded” to the level of access for commissioners and advisory delegates.

During assembly business sessions and committee meetings, most official participants will use laptop computers or tablets to access PC-Biz and to read and track the business and the assembly’s actions on it in real time.

You will need a laptop computer or tablet with wifi accessibility in order to function most effectively as a commissioner/advisory delegate when you are in St. Louis. More information will be available in the FAQ’s that can be found in the PC-biz Resource tab. If you do not have access to a laptop or tablet that meets these specifications and that you may bring with you to the assembly, please first contact your presbytery to inquire about borrowing one. The OGA will arrange to rent devices for use on-site for those who cannot bring one, but in the interest of good stewardship of the church’s funds, we hope most will have another source.

The assembly registration process includes a step for indicating if you will need to have a device provided by the assembly.

Changes and Cancellations

If at any time prior to the assembly you find that you are unable to serve as a commissioner or young adult advisory delegate, immediately contact your presbytery so that plans for an alternate can be made.

Mailings

Standing Rule B.6 provides that “the Stated Clerk make available the list of participants registered for a session of the General Assembly to entities of the General Assembly, councils of the denomination, educational institutions, teaching elders, and independent organizations composed primarily of members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).”

You may receive mailings that share information, invite you to events, or express concerns about business before the assembly from various organizations and/or individuals. Enabling groups and individuals to communicate their concerns directly while trusting the wisdom and discernment of commissioners and advisory delegates in this matter is a principle that has been supported by previous assemblies. In these instances, the OGA will not share email addresses or telephone numbers of commissioners and advisory groups.

The OGA will share email addresses of persons – including commissioners and advisory delegates—who purchase tickets to assembly functions (optional breakfasts, luncheons, etc.) with the sponsors of those events. Those sponsors agree to use these email addresses only to communicate information about the event. If you feel that you are receiving inappropriate emails related to the General Assembly please contact the G.A. Meeting Service.

Questions? Please contact:

G.A. Meeting Service gameetingservice@pcusa.org

800-728-7228, ext. 2417