

**MINUTES FOR THE SPECIAL MEETING OF
PRESBYTERY OF SAN JOAQUIN**
Thursday, July 22, 2010
First Presbyterian Church, Visalia, CA

Attendance:

Pastors: Charles Castles, Pat Sheahan, Paul DePledge, Bill Rudy, Dan Schwan, Randy Scheer, Tony Winterowd, Carl Knoch, Tom Parsons, Jim Rogers, Sandy Brown, Arlin Talley, Rick Irish, Tedd Lyons, Dave Watson

Commissioned Lay Pastors: Terry Barnhill (Terra Bella), Sue Ritter (Visalia), Robbyanto Notomihardjo (Ebenezer)

Elder Commissioners: Richard Crain (Three Rivers), Fred Leavitt (Exeter), Sophia Ewert (Sierra Vista), Joe Wilson (University), Sue Hammond (Westminster, Bkfld), Norman Ferreira (Hanford), Ron Wade (Orange Cove), Linda Hengst (Woodlake), Brian Vaccaro (Woodlake), Sharon Overgaard (Harvest), Terry Holland (Westminster, Fresno), Carol Harrison (Northminster), Judy Lucid (Sequoia), Lilace Turmon (Easton), Steve Musson (Dinuba), Janet & George Marberry (Terra Bella), Johnett Watt (Coalinga), Greg Olson (Dinuba), Ruth Davenport (Coalinga)

Council: Betty Braddy, Florence Ulrich, David Nash, Ruth Smith

Visitors: Roland Dinsmoor (Exeter), Beth Downie (Northminster), Hugh & Carol Taylor (Sierra Vista), Anne Myers, Ruth Davenport (Coalinga), Nikki Crain (Three Rivers), Kate Johnson (Hanford), Sharon Liggett (Hanford), Martha Bentley (Hanford), Bonnie Shaver (Hanford), Bob & Mary Line (Visalia)

At 7 p.m. the meeting was opened with prayer by Moderator Ruth Smith. Interim Pastor of the host church, Dave Watson, welcomed the Presbyters, followed by a brief time of worship and a meditation by Tom Parsons.

Representatives to the 219th General Assembly from the Presbytery of San Joaquin were introduced:

Rev. Sharon Stanley, Minister Commissioner from FIRM and UPC;

David Prewitt, Elder Commissioner from First Pres, Hanford;

Jonathan Phillips, YAAD from Lemon Cove;

Beth Downie, Alternate Elder Commissioner from Northminster, Bakersfield; and

Arlin Talley, pastor from Three Rivers and the national Presbyterian Men's Ministry.

Each one is to be commended for faithfully and sacrificially serving!

It was noted that, out of 17 mission co-workers commissioned at GA, four were from this Presbytery: Rich & Marilyn Hansen and Dusty & Sherri Ellington. And among the many already serving, two others come from this Presbytery: Jeff & Christie Boyd, who brought greetings to the Presbytery and expressed thanks for the Presbytery's support.

Personal reflections were given by each who attended and some reports are included here:

Rick Irish, Interim General Presbyter:

“As you have heard others say, we saw signs of God's hand at work in numerous ways during the week of GA. One that stands out to me is an experience I had while I was bowed for the closing prayer of the Presbyterians for Renewal breakfast. Without warning, I felt the Spirit well up within me, bringing me to the point of tears. At the same time a very clear picture formed in my mind of the Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council, Linda Valentine. In my mind's eye I approached her and said, “Be encouraged. God is at work through all that is happening to bring us to our knees so that God can do what only God can do.”

Not knowing what to make of this, I asked other leaders there who I trusted for discernment, and was encouraged to tell Linda, which I did, and for which she was very grateful. As I reflect back on this I am amazed. In the context of a denomination in which such mystical experiences are viewed at best with suspicion, grace abounded. I can believe nothing less than God spoke to this part of His Church we call the PCUSA, saying to us, “Be encouraged. God is at work through all that is happening to bring us to our knees, so that God can do what only God can do.”

Having thought a lot on this message, I believe it says that our Lord is not finished with the PCUSA! It also says to me that nothing has or will take place that he will not use for his purposes, even wrong-headed decisions. Does this sound anything like “...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose?” When I think of how many times God has used my failures to soften my stubborn pride, it makes sense he would do the same for a group of people as well.

I am particularly struck by the statement, “God is at work through all that is happening to bring us to our knees...” While we may be tempted to think others need it more than we do, we all know that from God’s vantage we are all continually in need of humility before Him.

We often wonder why the PCUSA is not thriving in our day. It has been tempting to think that if only “they” would agree with “us” God would bless the church. Could it be that by this very assumption we have invited God’s opposition to our efforts? The statement in James 4:6, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” seems to support this possibility. By it, I am convicted that I am included in the “us” who need to be brought to our knees so that “God can do what only God can do.”

Does such humility mean that we cease seeking to discern and contend for the truth? NO, by no means! But, it does mean that we do so in the spirit of Ephesians 4: “2 Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. 3 Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace.”

To me this means that we approach one another with an open hand rather than a clenched fist. It means that we open our hearts to the reality that people with whom we disagree are no less beloved of God than we are. It means that we listen to them for an understanding of truth we may need to hear. And personally, I believe it means discarding the use of labels, which are so often loaded with divisive judgments.

My friends, if it is true that God is working “...to bring us to our knees, so that God can do what only God can do,” would we not be wise to cooperate? And knowing that we do this kind of thing together better than alone, I suggest that we plan to gather this fall in retreat to prayerfully explore together what this means for us as a Presbytery. It is my hope that as we seek God in humility he will favor us by more and more doing “what only God can do,” akin to the early church where “...many wonders and miraculous signs were done...And the LORD added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

In conclusion, I want to say that, with all of our weaknesses and failures as a church, I am more convinced than ever that it is worth staying the course within the PCUSA. It may be more comfortable to leave and surround ourselves with people who think the way we do, but I believe we would be the less for it, and the church would be the less for it as well. This church needs us and we need this church!”

David Prewitt, GA Commissioner:

“Hello, before I begin I want to thank the members of our Presbytery for sending me to the 219th General Assembly. In many ways it was an up and down experience with moments of great sadness coupled with most amazing surprises I suspect is a display of personality of God moving in the Holy Spirit. Thank you I am grateful for the chance to serve the presbytery in

this experience. I want to share of my experience with four t's – our unity, polity, diversity and ministry. The last one is a bit of a stretch but I think you will get what I mean.

Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

Do you accept the scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal and God's Word to you?

These words are at the core of our unity in the PCUSA. Every elder and deacon, every pastor in smallest remotest church, everyone in this presbytery and every commissioner at the 219th General Assembly has affirmed these statements of faith. This is the core of who we are.

Our polity is both beautiful and challenging. Our corporate discernment of the Holy Spirit is by a vote of individuals each seeking discernment. Each individual is prayerfully engaged in quieting all voices within to hear the voice of the Author of life. At best we see in a mirror dimly. This calls for humbleness of the majority to protect those in the minority. It calls for a humble minority to accept as discernment views that are not their own.

The body of believers that share our vows is diverse. Let me share with you my anecdotal observations of this diversity using a pie chart. The smallest sliver of the pie represents at least one individual at GA who holds that truth is discerned only through experience and knowledge. Group B holds a view that all claims to truth are valid. Group C believe we are in a shift in discernment of love and justice in regard to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues. They hold slavery, women in leadership and changing views on divorce are a part of a continuing process of discernment. The sum of these groups makes up about half of the views in general assembly. Group D agrees with Group C on Slavery, women's issues and divorce but sees the LGBT lifestyle as sin which grace can heal. None of the groups are completely homogenous. Again these views are anecdotal. The relative size of each group is guess with the possible exception that the church seems to be evenly divided on LGBT issues.

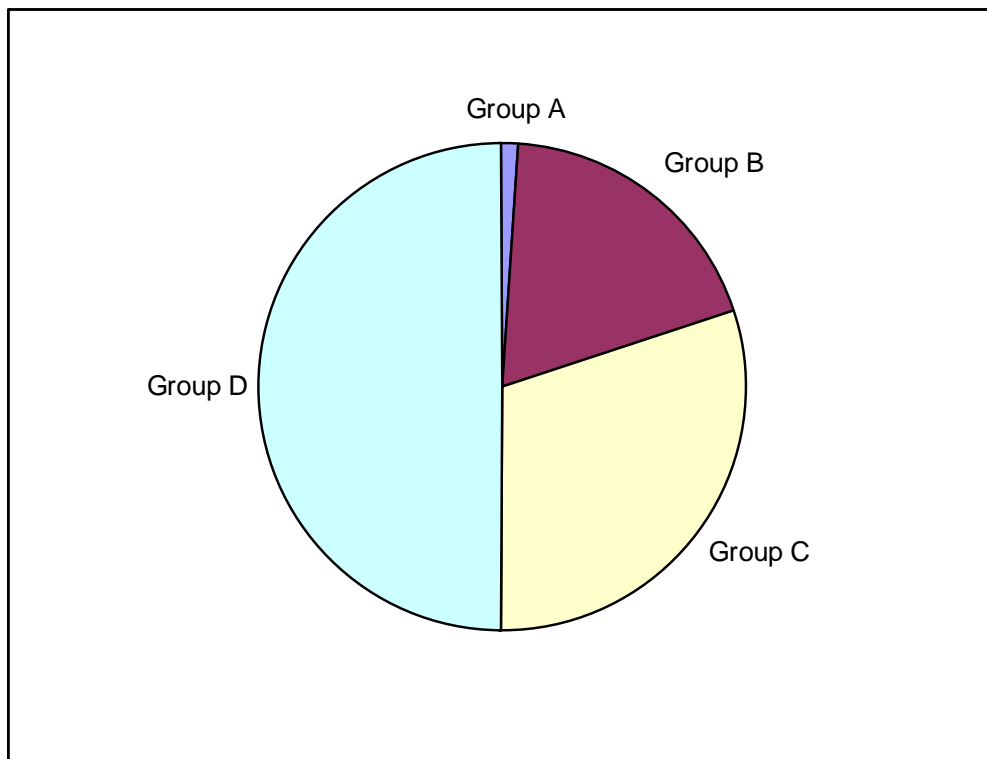


Figure 1

The body of the PCUSA is active in the great ends of the church. They can be represented at equal sized circles. The triad formed by these circles is an interesting coincidence.

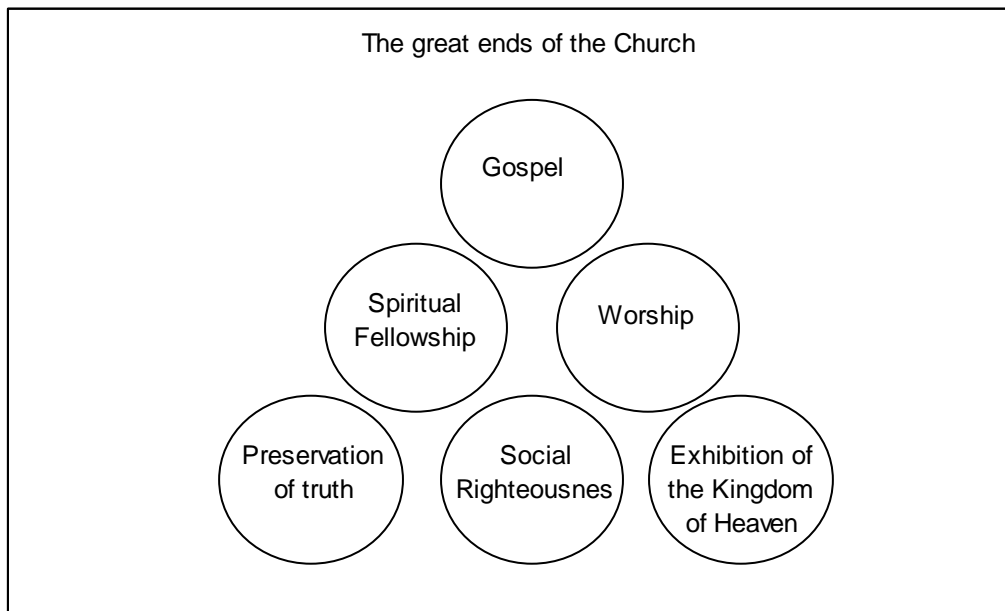


Figure 2

In my self-righteousness I have looked at the PCUSA and wanted to scream “Where’s the beef?” We spend a lot of time on social justice, oppressed peoples and companies that make tractors. Where is the transforming message that saves one life at a time? It seems to me that the lines were redrawn like this:

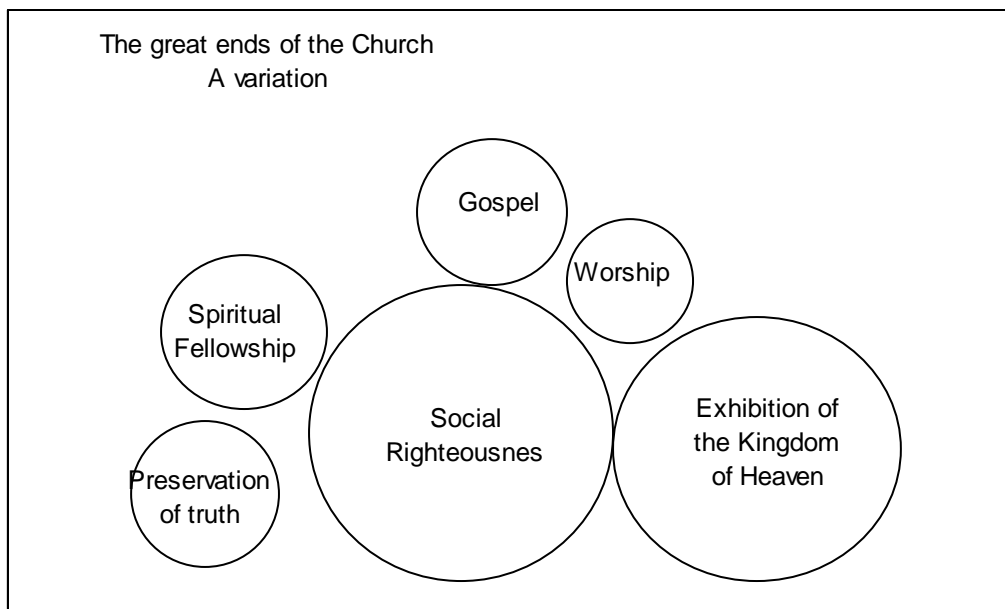


Figure 3

Note the lack of the curiously interesting triad.

My experience at General Assembly has challenged my thinking of the body of Christ and revealed my own biases. You see, I came to faith by the witness of a life lived in grace and by hearing the Gospel. It radically changed my life. As a consequence I have drawn the great ends of the church like this.

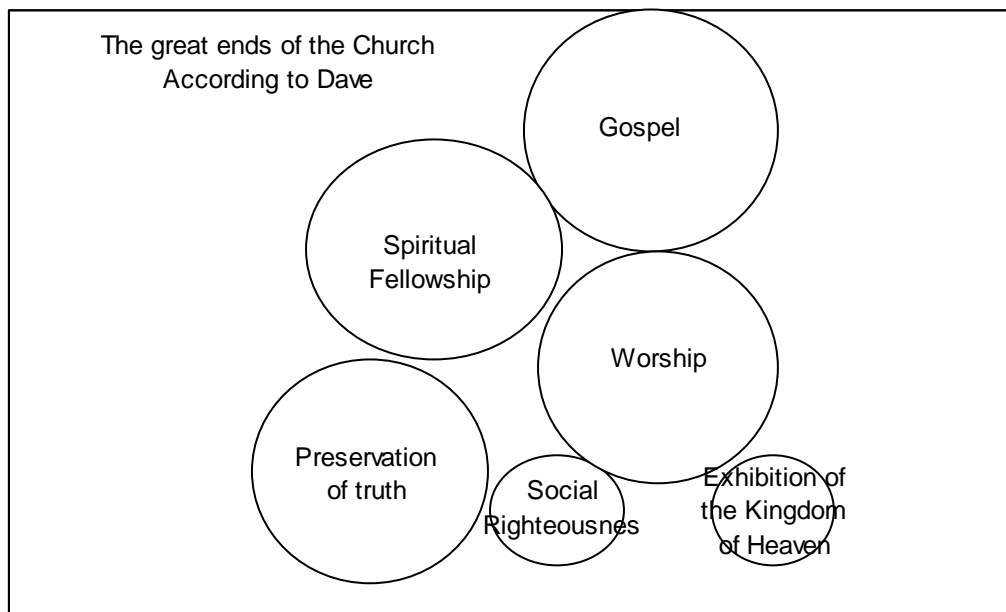


Figure 4

Again note the lack of the curiously interesting triad.

As I look within, the experience of the General Assembly shows me that I am not balanced in the great ends of the church. I don't weigh issues of social righteousness very heavy. This is a denial of the sheep and the goats' story in Matt 25:31-46. Likewise if social justice is the only end we lose the core unique message of the God to us in Jesus. Perhaps the full scope of the Divine message is discerned and expressed by being together with those who see things differently.

I have observed there are offices in the General Assembly that support each of the great ends of the church. The General Assembly Mission Council has a great website on "Growing the Church Deep and Wide" that is very encouraging in the spread of the good news that saves us from the inside out. In addition, great work has been done in Christ's name to restore clean drinking water in Haiti and build small businesses of dried fruit in Africa just to name a few.

In conclusion, my experience of the 219th General Assembly is that of a body engaged in the great ends of the Church. We are engaged in issues that have caused many of our friends to leave. We may yet face the same decision. Yet, there is reason for joy. We have all the right problems to have. People on both sides of the LGBT issues have a heart for the people involved. There is no hate only love. Along with these, our very difficult problems, the Gospel is proclaimed and social righteousness promoted.

This concludes my report. Thank you again for the chance to serve as Elder Commissioner at the 219th General Assembly."

Arlin Talley, Minister at Community Pres in Three Rivers:

"It was my privilege to attend the 219th General Assembly in my official capacity as an officer of National Presbyterian Men's Ministry. I helped set-up and staff the NPMM booth in the Exhibition Hall, Friday -Wednesday, July 2-7. My perspective and observations are those of someone on the sidelines in most respects, although NPMM was very active in greeting the hundreds of people who visited the hall and passed by the booth.

My first observation is that this was a civil gathering, at least in public. It was ironic that groups with opposing agendas were sometimes next to or across the aisle from one another. None the less, I did not witness any confrontation or disrespect in the Exhibition Hall.

In the few plenary sessions which I attended as an observer, the same spirit was present. Our moderator, Elder Cynthia Bolbach, seemed fair and respectful in her conduct of the sessions. Both in the committee reports and the debate/discussion strong opinions and feelings were expressed carefully and respectfully, and were received in like manner. It is likely that few minds/hearts were changed in the plenary sessions, but the process seemed to be decent and orderly.

My brother, Dee Talley, was the minister commissioner from Milwaukee Presbytery, and he arrived that first Saturday filled with some skepticism. After a day or two of preparation and committee meetings his perspective was somewhat changed. He commented how easy it was, when at home among colleagues, to maintain certainty about his points of view on the many items of business and issues to come before the assembly. However, when confronted with an individual across a table or in an adjacent chair who held a different opinion he surprised himself by his recognition of the other person's genuine concern. It was no longer only about issues, it was mostly about people.

Mostly that's what I saw, too, although as I watched people come and go it was disappointing to see people simply pass by one another without greeting, or to quickly glance away from a particular booth or group of people.

I also attended the Committee on Ministry gathering and participated in the Face to Face program, talking with several people about opportunities in our presbytery. The staff of Church Leadership Connection was very enthusiastic and helpful.

In addition to staffing a booth, the executive board of NPMM met Monday, July 5 at which time I was appointed Vice-moderator of National Presbyterian Men's Ministry. If my appointment is ratified by the Council of NPMM I will become the Moderator in April 2011.

Every General Assembly meeting is an opportunity for meeting old friends & colleagues, making new acquaintances, learning more about the larger church, and being reminded that the church is people; people called by Jesus Christ into a particular relationship with one another.

There were daily opportunities for worship, but I especially enjoyed the service Sunday morning. From the call to worship and procession – with a Native American influence, to the voices of thousands praising God, and to the sermon and Lord's Supper, it was a grand experience.”

Reports, printed and digital summaries, were also given on the major issues addressed at GA: 1. Middle East; 2. Caterpillar; 3. The Belhar Confession; 4. Ordination Standards; 5. Marriage & Civil Union; 6. The New Form of Government; and 7. Middle Governing Bodies. Actions that require responses from Presbyteries will be considered at the following meetings of Presbytery (specific dates still to be determined by General Council): February, 2011-The normal Book of Amendments (including issues like changes in ordination standards); April, 2011-The new Form of Government; and June, 2011-- The Belhar Confession.

The meeting was opened for questions and responses. No motions were made or actions taken.

The meeting was adjourned with prayer at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Irish
Stated Clerk