

GA226 Work Group Report to COGA

Members of the subgroup included Dave Davis, Blythe Kieffer, Eliana Maxim, Luis Ocasio-Torres, Robin Pugh, and Sallie Watson. Staff members assisting included Tricia Dykers-Koenig, Julia Henderson, Jihyun Oh, and Kerry Rice.

The work group did some significant work in the following areas:

- ★ **Values** - what are the values unrelated to the pandemic that we identified in shaping GA225 that we also wish to carry forward? Dave and Luis prepared the attached list of values for us to keep in consideration. (attachment A)
- ★ Distilling the list from the **mid council survey** and adding to it - Robin prepared a very helpful distillation of questions and comments from mid council leaders. It is also attached. (attachment B)
- ★ **Budgetary items and concerns** - Blythe worked closely with DeAmber Clopton to come up with budget figures for an in-person assembly, and budget ramifications if the 226 gathering in Salt Lake City is canceled. These financial statements are also attached (attachments C and D).
- ★ **Conversation partners** - Eliana and Luis came up with the following process for identifying conversation partners with whom we will need to speak as we continue to crystallize plans for GA 226:

Regardless of what the pandemic situation might be in 2024, COGA recognizes that General Assemblies will need to continue to evolve and adapt to the denomination we are becoming. In order to be both aware and responsive to the fullness of what the General Assembly experience is and the purpose it serves for many, COGA believes it is necessary to engage a variety of church leaders in conversations around the different aspects of the assembly.

We propose that COGA schedule virtual meetings with the following groups (but not limited to these) in the months of February through April 2022.

- parliamentarians
- racial ethnic groups (caucus, advocacy)
- Salt Lake City colleagues
- former GA moderators
- mid council leaders

Recommendation: Based upon full consideration of all of the work above, we recommend that the Committee on the Office of General Assembly honor the decision made four years ago to travel to Salt Lake City for GA 226.

Between now and then, as outlined above, we will be engaging partners and commissioners in conversation as to the structure and nature of the assembly itself, and will consider what enabling recommendations are needed to make it happen. These conversations will also serve to create opportunities for COGA to hear existing concerns about GA225 while restating and reaffirming COGA's full rationale. We believe that this recommendation allows us to nurture transparency in the wider church and to honor our financial obligations in Salt Lake City, while also giving us some leeway to modify practices put in place for GA 225 as necessary.

We have also consulted with the Standing Rules subcommittee to make sure that the work of both subcommittees is in harmony; we will continue collaboration with them.

Request: In order to enable this to happen, we suggest that the Committee on the Office of General Assembly request that the Stated Clerk provide an exception to the deadline for submission of recommendations that may come out of the above conversation groups. Such an exception would allow time between now and April to conduct the conversations and provide a final recommendation to Business Referral by May 3.

Things that we still need to address:

- Survey for commissioners as they arrive at 225
- Synthesized resources from our work to help 225 commissioners make their decisions.
- Consult with the Standing Rules group to ensure that the rules we will need for 226 will be in place

Attachment A - Values Statement

The Stated Clerk has called the PC(USA) to live into the fullness of being the church in the 21st century. This means identifying those values integral to our identity, as well as embracing creativity and openness in order to be more fully inclusive, flexible, and faithful.

In the planning of GA 225, COGA is responding to the call and vision of the Stated Clerk. The concern for health and safety amid the ongoing reality of the COVID 19 pandemic is clearly at the forefront of our work. However, it is essential to name the adaptations, adjustments, and changes related to GA 225 that are being implemented in order to have an assembly that more closely aligns with the convictions and values of the PCUSA.

A church that values relationship building

In-person committee work in Louisville at GA225 affirms a commitment to discernment nurtured in relationship. Relationships among commissioners deepen in committee experience that includes mealtime, breaks, and other non-meeting conversations. At GA 225 relationship building will happen with fewer distractions.

However, the church at every level has also learned that relationships can be experienced virtually. Virtual opportunities prior to, during, and after the assembly will allow commissioners to establish and maintain a breadth and depth of connection with one another, with elected leaders, and with staff/resource people beyond what was possible in prior GA gatherings. Participation in the assembly all across the church will be increased.

A church that aspires to empower all voices and privileges none

The technological possibility of hybrid meetings expands the possibility of participation in significant ways for various populations. The standing rules and practices related to the important role played by speakers at open hearings, overture advocates, and committee resource people have been reviewed and, in some cases, amended. Again, technology and the use of pre-recorded material will allow more voices at the table in committee work.

A church that sparks radical reconciliation

The schedule of GA225 allows for a GA celebration of Juneteenth on the opening Sunday. The pre-assembly virtual educational opportunities for commissioners will include anti-racism material, multi-cultural engagement, and guidelines for appropriate engagement and communication at any assembly gathering. A call for the church to be engaged in the ongoing work to end poverty, promote equity, and advocate for justice will be a strong theme throughout the assembly.

A church that aspires to connect and collaborate more than simply through a biannual meeting

“Hands and Feet” will again be an essential opportunity at GA225. The advocacy and justice effort will grow out of the context of our host city Louisville. The goal is that commissioners will share the passion and initiatives for social justice in their own context in the months and years following the meeting. In addition to the commitment to making more in-depth training available virtually prior to the assembly, commissioners will be asked to serve in various ways in the months and years after the Assembly. The nature of that expectation continues to be developed in conversations with the GA co-moderators, COGA, and OGA staff.

A church that upholds a faithful theology and practice of stewardship

The now realized possibility of hybrid meetings for the assembly and for other gatherings in the church will assist in ongoing conversations and actions related to care of the earth and climate change. The renovations to the Presbyterian Center will have a longer-term financial impact in reducing travel costs of larger gatherings and will provide the flexibility to pursue various models for the gathering of the larger church. The impact of traditional assemblies on per capita cost and the questions of the sustainability of that cost will only increase over time.

It is COGA’s hope and prayer that the value-laden aspects of GA 225 being implemented will be empowering to the life and work of the assembly and in the power of the Holy Spirit, will enable the assembly to speak to and work for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world today.

Attachment B - Summary of mid-council leaders conversations

Ideas for GA 226 planning... from interactions with mid-council leaders during GA 225 planning

Ways GA 225 will help GA 226

- Finding ways to make in-person segment of GA 225 feel like a national coming together of the church, similar in nature to past GAs, if smaller in number
- In-person gathering time needs to feel inspirational and meaningful
- Create ways to keep committee members in contact when things go virtual. Regular check ins on Zoom or group chats?

Messaging at GA225 and beyond

- Lift up committees as the place where the most valuable work gets done. Many seem to have the impression that if plenaries are online, no real work can happen.
- A change to how GA happens is not temporary. It may not stay this way, but it won't go back to the old way and why.
- GA committees meeting in person IS a national gathering of the church
- Ask for forgiveness and grace for mistakes, oversights and imperfect processes while we seek to change
- Acknowledge that everyone is tired and energy is low
- Name the tensions involved in any change, i.e., between going back in person or moving things online.
 - Some say BIPOC and younger members will be less involved with GA225 structure
 - Some say BIPOC and younger members will be more involved with GA225 structure
- How are we addressing internet connectivity issues?

Communications for GA 226

- Provide materials for mid-council leaders that clearly spell out the enticement to serve as a commissioner or YAAD in this new configuration.
- Recruiting video available early, that clarifies commitments as well as inspiring service.
- Include clearly and upfront what support is available for commissioners and YADS: childcare, tech support, etc.
- Simple explanations and language are required!! Idea: test comprehension of any communications going out with a church member NOT on COGA or any national committee.
- Social media can be a way to reach people re: issues and more on an ongoing basis
- Find out from 225 participants what was most enjoyable about participating, then include this in planning and center this in communications

- Many, many, many feel the in-person committees/online plenaries should have been flipped. Need to communicate WHY it was structured this way
- Deal with under-the-breath grumbling about going back to the old model and possibly revisionist memories of how well the old model worked. Put out something specific about why the old model was not continued.
- Compare actual time commitment for commissioners (in total days) with time commitments for previous GAs. People are confusing the “save these dates for now” with “these are the days you will be active at GA.”

Recruiting commissioners and YAADs for GA 226

- Find ways to minimize how much time must be set aside and communicate exact dates and location as soon as possible.
- The many uncertainties – COVID, dates, new format – make it very difficult to recruit. Any way these can be minimized will help.
- Explain why new model and what GA service means for the church
- Somehow need some fun, YAAD-specific programming
- How can we make online portions more fun?
- Name the difficulties in recruiting for something different, and somewhat unknown. Acknowledge the recruiting challenges and include the fact that is ok and to be expected in materials to middle governing bodies.

Other

- Need to have less business and more meaningful assemblies
- Need to be creative about ways to minimize Zoom time (shorter plenaries?)
- Many mid-council leaders feel loss and some resentment at the loss of connection with commissioners that the new format creates. There is frustration about not being able to come to Louisville for GA 225. How can we address this real hurt?
- Another model: have all committees meet at the same time in different locations around the country
- Overcome the “earned service” idea of GA commissioners to the “gifts for ministry”
- For future GAs, give commissioners the option to be online or in person?

Possible actions

- At GA 225, have a “Town Hall” for mid-council leaders to give feedback on various models for GA 226 in real time. This is a chance to work together with COGA as problem-solvers in planning for the future.
- Interview YAADs and commissioners at GA225 during committee meetings about meaningful experiences they are having. This can be used for GA 226 video.

At GA 226

- Find ways to connect YAADs during committee work and keep YAADs connected once GA moves into plenary. Idea: group text for YAADs across committees that were in person at the same time.

- Plan actions to happen when folks are gathered. Create meaning and community for commissioners.
- Create worship and other powerful experiences during in-person gathering times.
- Find new ways for mid-council leaders to serve at GA.

Attachement C - Projected GA226 Expenses
(assumes a “traditional” assembly)

<i>categories</i>	<i>budget</i>	<i>notes</i>
Commissioner and AD Expenses		
sleeping rooms	\$ 1,298,671.00	rates around \$179/night; single rooms
meals	\$ 540,594.00	
travel	\$ 500,000.00	travel costs increasing overall
other	\$ 51,500.00	buses, EAD travel, dependent care, etc.
Place of Meeting	\$ 71,000.00	newsroom, security, first aid, freight, water/coffee
Official Personnel	\$ 138,000.00	volunteers, student assistants, ecumenical guests
Plenary	\$ 472,501.00	audio/video, stagehands, electrical, interpretation
GA Program	\$ 4,000.00	Bible study
Local Committee	\$ 50,500.00	reduced expectations of COLA; reduced our financial support
Training	\$ 45,000.00	on-line training, equipment
Committees at GA	\$ 120,000.00	audio/video, support personnel
Worship	\$ 25,400.00	preacher travel and honoraria, music permissions, instrument rental
GA Technology	\$ 336,000.00	networking and internet costs, computers provided as needed
TOTAL	\$ 3,653,166.00	

Attachement D – Cancellation Fees should we not go to Salt Lake City

SALT LAKE CITY - 2024											
Salt Palace						till 7/31/21		8/1/21-1/15/23	after 1/16/2023		
						238,907	238,907	358,361	477,815		
<i>note - license fee would be \$1 if we were to hold the meeting.</i> In addition, CVB would contribute \$100,000 (already received) plus an additional \$8,000											
HOTELS											
	Peak	Total RN	Rate	Est Rev			till 6/26/2022	6/27/22-12/31/23	after 1/1/2024		
Marriott	350	2745	189	\$518,805	\$129,701.25	\$129,701.25	25%	60%	80%		
							\$129,701.25	\$311,283	\$415,044.0		
					till 6/30/20		7/1/20-6/30/21	7/1/21-6/30/22	7/1/23-12/30/23	after 12/31/23	
Hilton	300	2360	181	\$427,160	\$44,216.0	\$132,648.0	10%	30%	40%	50%	80%
Hilton F&B				\$15,000				\$176,864.0	\$221,080.0	\$353,728.0	
Total hotel cancel fees					\$173,917.25	\$262,349.25	\$306,565.25	\$532,363.00	\$768,772.00		
Total CC + hotels					\$412,824.25	\$501,256.25	\$664,926.25	\$890,724.00	\$1,246,587.00		