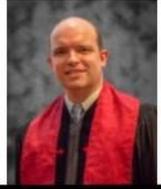


Pastor's Post



7-3-18: “Who Cares” about the General Assembly?

Dear Starmount Friends,

Last week in worship we were delighted to have former Starmount member, Matthew Cople, fill the pulpit. Matthew joined Starmount in 2010, attended Union Theological Seminary, has been serving at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Winston-Salem, and will now be ordained and installed as the next pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Henderson, NC. We celebrate with him as he begins a new call and wish him well in his journey.

One of the things Matthew reminded us of in his message last week was that the Presbyterian Church is a “connectional” church. I do like how one of his seminary professors defined that term, saying that a connectional church means that we are all connected to Jesus Christ as Savior and therefore are also connected to one another.

One of the important ways this plays out for us as Presbyterians is in our polity; the way we organize ourselves both internally and externally. We are connected to other churches in the P.C. (USA) throughout the region in organizations called “presbyteries.” Our church is a member of Salem Presbytery, which extends from around Boone, NC almost all the way to Chapel Hill, NC. The presbyteries from several states are grouped together in organizations called “Synods,” and the national gathering of all P.C. (USA) congregations is called the “General Assembly.”

Two weeks ago the General Assembly gathered for its 223rd meeting in St. Louis, MO. These meetings occur every two years and often cover a multitude of issues and topics. This meeting of the general assembly was no different. Over the course of a week, 538 commissioners and 200 advisory delegates worked and worshipped, engaged in hands-on mission work, attended committee meetings, debated overtures, moved for amendments, and cast their votes as the Spirit moved them.

I've included a link to a brief, but comprehensive article put out by the General Assembly that gives a good summary of the actions taken there.

[Summary Article on 223rd GA Actions](#) If you would like to read more in depth information regarding GA, I recommend a good news source in our denomination called the [Presbyterian Outlook](#).

The editor of the Presbyterian Outlook, Jill Duffield, writes an editorial that can be found on their website, in which she explores one all important question in regards to the actions of GA, and that question is, "Who cares?" She describes how this question comes to her from people in local Presbyterian churches across the country in various forms, from some who are keenly aware of the activities of the national denomination and others who have never even heard of the General Assembly.

I think it is an important question for us. Why should we care? Why should we at Starmount Presbyterian Church pay attention to anything that comes out of the General Assembly? I believe there are two important answers to that question that tell us why we should care.

The first came to us in worship last week; a reminder that we are a connectional church, one that is united in our call to seek and serve Jesus Christ. As the structure of our polity represents, we believe that the Holy Spirit is better discerned as groups of faithful disciples listen together for where God might be calling us to go or what God may be calling us to do. This listening and discernment of the will of God is something that must happen at every level in our church, whether it be our own Session, our Presbytery, our Synod, or the national church. Every two years, the meeting of the General Assembly gives our Presbyterian Church the unique opportunity to listen and discern what the will of God may be for our denomination at this particular time in our history.

The second answer to the question of "Who cares?" comes in the form of a question itself. "How do we put our faith into action?" This is the question that came up over and over again at this year's GA. It is also the question that we wrestle with individually and collectively as a congregation. We believe God has called us to give life to our faith, that it should not simply live in words and phrases, but that it should translate into everyday actions that make an impact on the world around us. James 2:14-17 reminds us of this connection between our faith and our actions. Even our Book of Order (Section F) reminds us that the Church is to be "a community of witness" sharing the good news of God's transforming grace through both word and work in the world.

And while as Christians, we may all agree on this connection between faith and actions, quite often we will disagree on exactly which actions are appropriate. As you read the reports of the actions of GA, you may find yourself disagreeing with some and agreeing with others. Some may give rise to feelings of joy and others may produce feelings of disappointment. Some may just simply leave you scratching your head and wondering what they are talking about.

Whenever I find myself having any of those reactions while reflecting upon GA actions, I always try to remind myself that the actions taken at GA represent a good faith effort on the part of many individuals to discern the will of God for the Presbyterian Church. My

hope is that they encourage continued dialogue and discussion among all in our denomination as we continually wrestle with the question of how best to put our faith into action, as a denomination, as a church, and as individuals.

If you have any questions regarding the actions of the General Assembly, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. I would be more than happy to engage in conversation regarding these important issues. After all, we are indeed a connectional church which means that we are interconnected through relationships; relationships with each other and ultimately in our relationship in Jesus Christ. I am delighted to be a part of this congregation where we can listen together for how God might be calling us to put our faith into action at Starmount Presbyterian Church.

In Christ,
Charlie Lee