

From This Corner

Reflections on General Conference I

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This month I and my colleagues who are a part of the delegation to General Conference will be heading for Fort Worth. We will do our part in the work of the General Church. Even though the preparation has added time consuming agenda to my life, and will cut into fly fishing this spring, I am looking forward to it. I consider it an honor to have been elected. The reality is very few ever get this opportunity.

This month I am going to reflect in a very general way about my experience to date. Let me be sure to point out that this constitutes my personal viewpoint, lest any other delegate be seen as “guilty by association.”

First, I have been inundated with material which probably took an acre of trees to produce, and no less than a national forest to produce for all the delegates. The material includes the “official material” from our General Boards and Agencies and our various “caucuses.” The Daily Christian Advocate which constitutes the working papers alone totals 1,560 pages of reports and petitions. That is 379 pages less than my favorite Bible. Somehow I found in that trivia some assurance that we had not plunged into the abyss of ecclesiastical craziness.

There are several reasons the DCA is so large. The first is that our boards and agencies sometimes justify themselves in doing studies and producing reports with a zeal that knows no bounds. Apparently it is the corporate conviction that the Kingdom will finally be ushered in by bureaucracy. On the other hand you do have to read all of it carefully because in the middle of it is often found something truly worthy of consideration. The second reason the DCA is such a substantial set of volumes is that every United Methodist “Dick, Tom, and Sally” has the right to petition the General Conference with their idea of correctives and initiatives which they feel will serve Jesus or their own political agenda. Our church is, like it or not, a democracy at work. God gave us free will and United Methodists engage it with enthusiasm. Among these also are instances of real insight and God honoring things.

On top of this, delegates receive propaganda by groups, causes, and other zealots. Sometimes these are produced with great care and insight. Other times they are filled with inaccuracies, outright lies, and

devious hidden agendas. Most all of it is produced, edited, and packaged in such a way as to look and sound like “the truth and nothing but the truth.”

So I conclude this first column on General Conference 2008 with what I hope is a thought provoking and uplifting observation. In the end, an updated Book of Discipline has always been produced that is actually an amazingly faithful document that has guided us on our way, and has preserved us as one of the remaining denominations that is at least a significant amount of time Wesleyan and apostolic in faith and action. If this continues every four years it may rate as one of the world’s significant corporate miracles. I don’t want a failure on my watch.

So brother and sisters, pray for all the delegates, that we may remain open to God using our denomination as a faithful version of “The Body of Christ.” Pray for us lest for lack of discernment we become just another reflection of the world’s agenda cloaked in religious garb.