

From This Corner

## Reflections on General Conference II

Larry Baird

I was sitting in my assigned seat on the General Conference floor when the text message arrived from my wife Brenda. She had flown down to Fort Worth to share the experience and was seated in the visitors' section just above where our delegation was located. When I looked at the message it read, "Shall we gather at the river, or legislative hell?" Her comment captured one reality of General Conference. It is a grueling process of legislation. In my pre-conference article I described the huge volume of legislation that gets sent for consideration. It was even more intimidating when it actually arrived from the legislative committees and we had brief moments to consider our vote. It was not easy because you had to ask what the ramifications of the piece would be for our life together. Often the legislation arrived from the legislative committee altered from what you examined in your pre-conference study. The reality is that in some cases we will not know the outcome of our votes until it is lived out in the life of our connectional church. After receiving Brenda's text message your delegation decided that if we should ever awake at some distant point in the future sitting in those same seats we would know our eternal destiny.

The reality is your delegates' days began sometime around 5 a.m. and concluded the next morning around 1 a.m. as we collapsed in our beds. I want you to know that you had an extremely dedicated and diligent delegation, including the alternates who sat for us when we could no longer function appropriately. We knew it was time for them to come to our aid when some issue or comment sent us either into hysterical laughter, or a mundane moment in the life of the conference reduced us to tears.

Fortunately there is more to General Conference than "legislative hell." Some of it did "gather us at the river." It provided opportunities to make new friends, hear inspired preaching from some of our bishops, and see the global church at work. One of the highlights was the joy-filled presence of "The Hope for Africa Children's Choir." Many of its members are orphans who have lost their families to civil war violence or AIDS. Their entire being and presence testified to the work of The Holy Spirit that invades people's lives when they embrace the Good News of Jesus Christ. I think they were sent by God to remind us of the real work of the Church and what the results of faithfulness could be.

General Conference also gave us an opportunity to experience the warmth of the hospitality of the host conference churches. In my case it even gave me an opportunity every morning to share friendly greetings with the same parking lot attendant and then a brief Christian blessing with each other on the last day. You never know where you will meet a sister in the faith.

Next month I'll be sharing more about the revelation of General Conference. I think I've discovered what is important for us to be doing and what is not. There were lots of both in Fort Worth.