PORTLAND -- On the 60th anniversary of making women eligible to be pastors, and the 85th anniversary of ordaining its first woman elder, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) made history again Saturday, electing two women as co-moderators for the first time.

Denise Anderson, a pastor from National Capital Presbytery, and Jan Edmiston, a presbytery executive from Chicago, were overwhelmingly elected Co-Moderators of the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

By the way, it also was the first-ever election of co-moderators, which was possible because of a change made in the standing rules just two years ago.

Moreover, in the history of the denomination, a Co-Moderator Election T. Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston are elected as Co-Moderators of the 222nd General Assembly. Photo: Danny Bolin

PORTLAND -- More than 3,000 people gathered in the Oregon Convention Center Saturday morning for the opening worship service of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Commissioners, advisory delegates, other assembly participants, and members of Presbyterian congregations from across the Northwest heard a rousing call to live God’s message of reconciliation.

They were joined by groups of Presbyterians from across the country, as well as at least one person in Scotland and another in Lebanon, who participated via live-streaming technology.

Artistic representations of cathedral windows surrounded the expansive plenary hall worship space. Images of chaos and continuity opened the way to the message of peace and reconciliation.

The General Assembly Choir sing at Opening Worship. Photo by Danny Bolin

Continued on page 2
beauty served as visual reminders of the creation of life amid the world’s present state of crisis.

In his call to worship, outgoing General Assembly Moderator Heath Rada proclaimed, “This is a glorious day for our Presbyterian family, and may it be a glorious day for our world.”

Worshippers experienced a musical extravaganza: soaring organ and piano notes, bells, and vocals of a mass choir from Portland-area churches, as well as the clap-inducing guitar chords and drumbeats of the Winter Street Worship Band from First Presbyterian Church in Salem.

Preaching from Genesis 45:1–15, Rada said the biblical story of the estrangement of Joseph and his brothers is especially relevant at this moment in history.

“We’ve seen our world divided,” he said. “We’ve seen our church divided. We’ve lived through Orlando. We too have found ourselves estranged—at odds with one another over theological and social issues.”

But just as God worked to reconcile Joseph and his brothers, Rada said, “we’re here today to be reconciled, to love one another.”

In his travels across the church during his two years as Moderator, Rada said he was surprised to see “much more focus on love and grace and acceptance around the Communion table than on division.”

Of course, the divisions are still there, he added, “but why must we expend so much more energy on our divisions than on looking at what unites us?”

Rada invited worshipers to visualize God’s reconciling love as Jesus described it in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32): “God is running down the road right this minute to embrace us. Don’t let our arguments overshadow the gift of acceptance we’ve been given.”

Reinforcing Rada’s message, worshipers were asked to turn their backs to the center of the room during the Call to Confession, then to turn to face the center, and each other, for the Assurance of Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

The service included a commissioning of advisory delegates and commissioners for their work at the General Assembly. Those being commissioned said together a passage from the Confession of 1967 — a confession that Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons reminded everyone “was born in this city 50 years ago” — the last time a Presbyterian General Assembly was held in Portland.

The service’s offering was earmarked for the Peace and Global Witness Offering, one of four Special Offerings of the PC(USA).

Jana Childers, the dean of San Francisco Theological Seminary, joined Rada in officiating at a celebration of Communion that closed the service. As worshipers lined up to receive the bread and cup, they reached out to one another with hugs, handshakes, and words of reconciliation:

“In Jesus Christ you are forgiven. Thanks be to God.”

Continued from page 1
SWEATY SHEEP AID HOMELESS, COMPLETE SHORTENED PILGRIMAGE

By Bob Sloan
General Assembly News

PORTLAND — Some might look at the unexpected turns that confronted the Pedaling Pilgrimage sponsored by Sweaty Sheep Ministries and see the event as a failure. Organizer Ryan Althaus is not one of them.

Only six cyclists were up to the challenge of bicycling from Santa Cruz, California, to Portland for the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This was the second assembly for the Pedaling Pilgrimage; the first was four years ago at GA220 in Pittsburgh.

"We had a number of people drop out at the last minute, so we made a few changes to our plan," said Althaus, the founder of Sweaty Sheep and a candidate for the ministry. "We just embraced the situation for what it was and continued on."

Rather than make the planned 850-mile trek, the group opted to spend time volunteering with the Homeless Garden Project in Santa Cruz, which Althaus serves as development director. They also volunteered with a Habitat for Humanity service project before beginning a shortened journey to the assembly at the Oregon Convention Center.

The group started pedaling Thursday after meeting up in Yachats, Oregon, and rode 76 miles to Corvallis, where they spent the night. Mounting their bikes again on Friday, they traveled from Corvallis to Salem, from Salem to Tualatin and from Tualatin to Portland, where they arrived late Friday night. All told, their pilgrimage covered nearly 160 miles.

Pete Wells, stated clerk of the Presbytery of Eastern Oregon, was one of the participants.

Continued on page 4
“It was great experience,” said Wells, who took up cycling a year ago. “I had a wonderful time, and it was easily the farthest I’ve ever ridden.”

Also joining in the pilgrimage was Brian Heron, the pastor of Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Portland. Heron is an avid cyclist, author and blogger who was nicknamed “The Pedal Pilgrim” after finishing a 10-week, 4,000-mile cycling pilgrimage across America in 2011 and writing a book about the adventure titled “Alone.”

Althaus said he saw the pilgrimage as a great lead-in to Active Life Sunday, which will be recognized by the PC(USA) on June 26. Active Life Sunday grew out of Active Life Church, an initiative designed to inspire churches to integrate physical activity into their worship and fellowship.

“It was Plato who said, ‘An hour of play is worth a lifetime of conversation,’” he added.

He hopes Active Life Sunday will become an annual event to promote the connection between faith and fitness.

Althaus was quick to point out that while the pilgrimages tend to get a lot of media exposure, the events are merely a “means to promote the real message, which is the plight of the homeless and the church’s responsibility to respond to the homelessness problem.”

He suggested that participants in GA222 use part of their per diem to help feed the homeless.

Althaus said the PC(USA) could learn something from the difficulties faced by the organizers and participants in this year’s pilgrimage.

“Our denomination is facing a lot of headwinds and potholes,” he said. “We have to embrace the failures that we face and find new ways to stay on the bike. We have to welcome the headwinds and the potholes and understand that they come with the territory.”

He said the solution to the denomination’s problems cannot be solved with innovation. It’s more about a desire to do mission work and being the hands and feet of Christ in a literal sense, he said.

“Our denomination in many ways has unrestricted resources, but restricted passion when it comes to missions and ministry,” he said. “(Our denomination is one of the wealthiest, but is also one that is shrinking the fastest in terms of membership. Maybe it should be the other way around – having restricted resources and unrestricted passion. Maybe if we were one of the poorest denominations then we might become one of the fastest-growing.”

For more information on the Sweaty Sheep ministry, visit www.sweatysheep.com.

For more information on Active Life Church, visit www.activelifechurch.org.

For more information on the homeless garden project in Santa Cruz, visit www.homelessgardenproject.org.
HISTORY MADE AS PC(USA) ELECTS CO-MODERATORS FOR FIRST TIME
Continued from page 1

women had never been elected as both moderator and vice moderator.

“This is simply historic,” said Anderson, the pastor of Unity Presbyterian Church in Temple Hill, Maryland. “It is the first time our denomination has elected co-moderators. Either way the wind blew tonight, you were going to have co-moderators.”

During a press conference after the election, she also noted that she is the youngest person ever elected as moderator or vice moderator.

“This is very humbling,” said Edmiston, associate executive presbyter for ministry at the Presbytery of Chicago. “This is the 60th anniversary of the ordination of women to Word and Sacrament and the 85th anniversary of the ordination of women as ruling elders. This is support for the leadership of women. We will be modeling a new way to be the church in the 21st century.”

Anderson and Edmiston defeated Adan Mairena, a teaching elder and new-church development pastor from Philadelphia, and David P. Parker, a ruling elder and lawyer from North Carolina, by a margin of 76 percent to 24 percent.

In speeches and during the question-and-answer period after the election, both teams emphasized that this is a time of transition and opportunity for the PC(USA).

“We want you to remember this number: 104,” Anderson said. “That is the number of weeks between now and the next General Assembly. We pledge to show respect and compassion. Listening is more than waiting to talk.”

Edmiston explained that she was told this is the terrible time to stand for co-moderator, with congregations leaving the denomination and with the retirement of Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons. But “God works best in times of transition, and chaos and anxiety,” she said. “It is in times like these that the Spirit shows us what God can do, which we cannot do ourselves.”

In the same vein, Mairena explained how he learned from his parents, natives of Honduras, that the denomination is a connectional one that enables people to live out their passions for social justice.

Parker expanded upon the value of working together in planning for the church 25 years from now, when half of those who are members now will have died. “We must address who will we have and what will the world and the church look like,” he said.

All agreed that part of the historic value of the PC(USA) is that it makes it possible for people who disagree to come together in disagreement as well as in agreement.

“This job is not about who is gifted for it, but who is called to it,” Edmiston said.

Parker noted that the PC(USA) is one of the few institutions in which people who aren’t in agreement can come together to express their viewpoints, then break bread together without rancor.

In answering a question about congregations that have left the denomination, Anderson said: “The most important thing that Christ gets the glory. I want you to stay, but church will still go on, and Christ will still be its head.”

Edmiston and Anderson acknowledged that how a co-moderator model will work is yet to be determined.

“We are going to have to work out the nuts and bolts,” Anderson said. “This has never been done before.”

They said each of them expects to handle about half of the moderator’s role.

“We don’t have to be at everything together,” Edmiston said, “but there is the advantage that people always want to see the Moderator, not the Vice Moderator. Now, whichever one of us they get, it will be the Co-Moderator.”
OPENING PLENARY BEGINS BUSINESS FOR GA222

By Gregg Brekke
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – With pipes and drums, prayers and song, reports and remembrances, the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) began its work Saturday, encouraged by Heath Rada, Moderator of the 221st General Assembly (2014), to remember that “hope does not disappoint.”

Referring to the assembly theme, “Hope is our calling,” Rada reported on his two-year term as Moderator, which ended later in the day with the election of Co-Moderators to serve for the next two years.

“For months I’ve had the privilege of listening to brothers and sisters around the church,” Rada said. “May we, you and I, be messengers for Christ in ways that will allow the world believe in him. “Hope does not disappoint, and we must not disappoint hope.”

The moderator’s report was the highlight of the afternoon session, which included orientation of commissioners and an introduction to Portland, which last hosted an assembly 50 years ago.

The bulk of the “issues, concerns and hopes” he has heard from those in the denomination fall into four areas, Rada said.

First is identifying who and what we are. Calling for a renewal of faith formation and proclamation, Rada said he heard a call from many voices to make the church an institution that encourages people to tell the story of Jesus Christ and to serve others.

“We must engage in radical listening in all areas of our church, but especially in evangelism,” he said. “This call to evangelism was made difficult by ‘a largely unchurched cultural climate’ in the United States and growing numbers of ‘nones’ (those who profess no religious affiliation) and ‘dones’ (those who once belonged to a church but have left).

“Yet people are asking for spiritual encounters which can help them make connections, embrace differences and live into commonalities with others,” he said. “We live in a society where people are longing to find a structure, a sanctuary if you will, that addresses deepest longing ways they embrace and nurture their members and communities.”

Second, re-vitalizing our congregations, in part by identifying the local churches where most people find their primary connections and relate to the congregations’ primary purposes. Rada said many local churches are seeking attention and support from the denomination.

He said small, rural congregations – which serve 80 percent of the denomination’s members – feel they are not getting enough support. “They realize they may not have the potential for growth in numbers,” he said, “but they do believe they can strengthen their ministry in the ways they embrace and nurture their members and communities.”

He said larger churches “say they are, in many cases, almost entities unto themselves,” and feel little connection to the national church or their presbyteries. “We need to explore what that means,” he said. “In essence, what I have heard is a desire for us to right-size our resources as a denomination and encourage and affirm new paradigms for congregational life, ministry and mission.”

The third major issue is justice for all people. Saying the PC(USA) has historically stood up against the cultural norm in the interest of promoting justice, Rada called for “a space where we can have a difference of opinion, and protect the individual conscience of our members. I’ve heard that cry expressed acutely as it relates to the areas of racial, economic … and religious justice. Presbyterians said we are called to be spokespersons for justice, both within and outside the church.”

“We must realize that through our denomination we have enjoyed the ability to address and lessen discrimination against our LGBTQ brothers and sisters,” he said, going beyond his prepared statements in light of the massacre in Orlando last weekend. “We must look for ways to do that and questions … By joining our collective voices and our different perspectives, we might be able to tell even more people about Jesus.”

Continued on page 7

SUNDAY, JUNE 19th, 5:30 PM

The Rev. Dr. Yvette Maud
Noble-Bloomfield, Vice-President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Dr. Noble-Bloomfield is a minister in the United Church of Jamaica and Cayman Islands, where she serves as the Deputy General Secretary.
which are loving and affirming."

The fourth issue concerns education. "No denomination or Christian organization has directed more of its heart, soul and resources to education than the PC(USA)," Rada said. Applauding congregational education, educational camps and conference centers, seminaries and colleges, he said Presbyterians have had "a profound impact on public education in our nation and around the world."

"I've had the privilege of going around the world and meeting in schools and education centers started by Presbyterians," he said. "I've heard from many about their gratitude for the PC(USA), starting schools around the world, especially as we've directed resources for the education of women."

Summarizing his remarks on the four areas Rada called "our common calling," he asked: "Where do we go now? How are we to let go of our malaise and to respond as a family of faith? "My own instincts are that we will find our way, both remembering who we are and daring to be who we could be."

The session followed a service of remembrance for the victims of gun violence in Charleston, South Carolina and Orlando, Florida.

Mienda Uriarte, coordinator of mission work in Asia and the Pacific for the Presbyterian Mission Agency, introduced ecumenical delegates from Bangladesh and Indonesia to offer their prayers and greetings.

Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons called the roll, greeting 594 commissioners from 171 presbyteries, 141 young adult advisory delegates, 20 theological student advisory delegates, eight missionary advisory delegates and 14 ecumenical advisory delegates.

The Committee on Local Arrangements welcomed the commissioners, delegates and advisors to Portland, home to nearly 40 of the 100 churches in the Presbytery of the Cascades.

As a pipe and drum team played "Canticle of the Turning," COLA representatives paraded through the assembly hall with signs representing churches from the presbytery.

COLA Co-Moderator Beth Neel concluded the committee's greetings with a wish: "May you find unexpected blessings and abundant joy this week."

GA221 Vice-Moderator Larissa Kwong Abazia and Parsons led the assembly through what Parsons called "learning the nuts and bolts of how we do business during plenary meetings."

The opening plenary concluded with a video celebrating Parsons, who is retiring at the Assembly's conclusion.

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Rev. Alison Harrington is committed to serving people on the margins of society. Since 2009, as the pastor of Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona, 60 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, she has led her congregation and surrounding community in providing sanctuary to immigrants facing deportation.

Hear Rev. Harrington speak at lunch on Wednesday, June 22, 12:00–1:30 p.m. at the Convention Center.

Sponsored by San Francisco Theological Seminary.

“The faith compels us to act. It’s about who we are as Christians. When Jesus says, ‘I was a stranger, and you welcomed me,’ we don’t see that as a metaphor.”

—Rev. Alison Harrington

San Francisco Theological Seminary
www.sfts.edu
PORTLAND – Nearly 400 Presbyterians turned out at the Oregon Convention Center Saturday morning for the start of what promise to be extensive conversations at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) about the identity and future of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The “Riverside Conversations,” held just before the formal convening of the assembly, which runs June 18-25 – centered around a survey of Presbyterians conducted by the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly in the last half of 2015. The resulting report is titled “When We Gather At The Table: A PC(USA) Snapshot.”

The Rev. Eileen Lindner, a New Jersey pastor and professional researcher who led the COGA survey, said: “The root question is, ‘In all the changes in our denomination, who do we perceive ourselves to be? Who do we think we are as Presbyterians?’

Lindner also briefed the Assembly Committee on The Way Forward on the survey during a committee session Friday afternoon.

More than 3,000 Presbyterians participated in the survey, Lindner said -- almost double the number COGA had expected to attract.

“We tried to create a kind of mirror so people can see who they really are, rather than what they think they are,” she said.

Like a patient getting a first look at the results of cosmetic surgery, Lindner added, “The advice is to always trust the mirror.”

Lindner said COGA found four common threads in the survey responses:

• The denomination has experienced an erosion of denominational identity. “Maybe not erosion,” she said, “but definitely a transition in what denominational identity means.”
• Presbyterians like being Presbyterians. Among the factors that account for their satisfaction, the survey found, are denominational polity, parity between teaching elders and ruling elders, Reformed theology, the fact that the denomination is “a thinking church,” and “many aspects of our program life.”
• “We are a segmented church,” in Lindner’s words. There are “clusters of values” in the PC(USA), from committed social justice advocates, to lifelong Presbyterians apparently unwilling to leave the denomination under any circumstances, to “those who are disappointed and discerning their place in the denomination.” This range of attitudes, she said, “poses great challenges for us.”
• The PC(USA) is becoming an increasingly “congregational-centric” church – Lindner said “connectional” Presbyterians have long bemoaned “creeping congregationalism,” which she said has become “the default ecclesiology for American Christians, and a serious threat to our historically connectional church.”

Participants in the Riverside Conversations spent much of the two-hour session – held in the assembly’s cavernous Exhibit Hall – in small-group discussions of two questions:

• “In what ways do – and could – the common values reflected in ‘When We Gather at the Table’ serve as shared/common ground for the PC(USA)?”
• “To what extent do disagreements expressed in ‘When We Gather at the Table’ reflect a healthy, robust and inclusive organizational structure and culture?”

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The Presbyterian Historical Society The National Archives of the PC(USA)
GENERAL ASSEMBLY REMEMBERS VICTIMS IN CHARLESTON, ORLANDO MASSACRES

By Gregg Brekke
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – A year and a day ago, nine church-goers were killed in Charleston, South Carolina. Six days ago, 49 people were gunned down in a nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

On Saturday, Presbyterians gathered for the opening plenary session of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) remembered those events before taking up their first item of business.

“Our peace has been ripped apart by an act of mass violence,” said Heath Rada, Moderator of the 221st assembly. “It tore at our hearts as we are reminded of too many shootings and too many victims.”

Donnie Woods, general presbyter of Charleston Atlantic Presbytery, and Dan Williams, general presbyter of the Presbytery of Central Florida, opened with a call to prayer and witness, lighting three candles – one for the victims in Charleston and Orlando, one for the countless lives ended too soon by gun violence, and one for a “world free from violence and hate.”

“We light these candles to honor their lives [and] the thousands more – families, neighbors and friends – whose lives also have been shattered by violence and loss,” Williams said, “and to acknowledge in confession and sorrow the loss of life still to come as public violence in our nation continues unchecked.”

A prayer litany was led by Terry McCrae Hill, pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Portland, Wajdi Said from the Portland Muslim Community and Eliana Maxim, associate executive presbyter of Seattle Presbytery.

Eliana Maxim (left), Terry McCrae Hill (center), and Wajdi Said (right) lead a prayer litany for the victims of Charleston and Orlando. Photo by Michael Whitman

Continued from page 11
PORTLAND ATTRACTIONS FEATURED IN MISSION TOURS

Office of the General Assembly

The sights and sounds of Portland will be on display during tours and events planned by the Committee on Local Arrangements for the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) June 18-25.

“Throughout the week we have something for everyone – bike tours, walking tours, site-seeing tours in historic Portland, wine tasting, and a live theater performance,” said Leala Harris, co-chair for COLA’s special events committee. About 25 tours, available through registration, were offered during the biennial gathering.

For those interested in exploring the area before the assembly, pre-tours of the historic Astoria and Oregon coast and the Columbia River Gorge and Mt. Hood Loop were offered on June 17.

A similar exploration opportunity is a Mt. Saint Helen’s tour to be offered on Saturday, June 25, at the end of the assembly. “The volcano is an all-day event,” Harris said.

“We are quite excited to present Portland in a very unique way,” she added. “All of the offerings have been extremely well-received.”

Mount Hood
GENERAL ASSEMBLY REMEMBERS VICTIMS IN CHARLESTON, ORLANDO MASSACRES

Continued from page 9

Said prayed: “Lead us to the straight path of all the prophets … Incline [us] towards peace, and justice and trust in God, for the Lord is one that hears and knows all things. And the servants of God – the most compassionate, the most gracious – are those who walk on the Earth in humility, and when we address them, we say, ‘Peace.’”

Asking “how long, Lord,” Maxim prayed for “peace where there is no peace,” saying, “In the wake of public violence that should be impossible to contemplate and yet has become all too common in our experience, open our eyes, and break open our hearts, and strengthen us to build your kin-dom where there is a welcome for all.”

The litany was accompanied with verses from songs by well-known Presbyterian hymn writer Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. Her hymn in memory of Charleston’s victims, “They Came to Read the Bible,” includes the line, “We grieve a wounded culture where fear and terror thrive, where some hate others for their race and guns are glorified.”

A song Gillette wrote after the Orlando massacre, “To a Place of Celebration,” grieves the loss of life and pleas for healing: “To a place of celebration filled with laughter, dancing, joy, came such violent devastation – one man’s efforts to destroy. God, we grieve for loved ones taken; we lament, ‘What can we do?’ Now, we’re feeling lost and shaken; heal our nation! Make us new!”

The service was organized by Robina Winbush, associate stated clerk for ecumenical relations; Laurie Kraus, director of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance; and Rick Ufford-Chase and Laurie Anderson, interfaith associates for theology of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

THE COMMEMORATIVE PIN FROM THE 1967 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1967 was the last time GA met in Portland. For many years, commissioners and advisory delegates received a commemorative pin with the GA logo on one side and the number, dates and place of the GA on the back. The pins were discontinued in 1997. This pin was worn 50 years ago by Ruling Elder Commissioner Oliver Bruns, a member of First Presbyterian Church of Everson, Washington, and a commissioner from the Presbytery of Bellingham. It is now worn by his daughter, Ruling Elder Linda Gaines of Bethany Presbyterian Church in Tacoma, Washington.