

GA-1736

REPORT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FUTURING TASK FORCE

Background

At the direction of the General Assembly, the Administrative Committee created a Task Force to make a recommendation regarding the future of General Assemblies. Due to declining attendance, declining revenue for the event and thus an operating loss, it was not deemed fiscally responsible to authorize the Office of General Minister and President to begin executing contracts for the 2019 General Assembly with the city of Des Moines, until a review of our current assembly model has been completed and alternatives explored.

Active Committee Members: Glen Miles, Chair, Julia Brown Karimu, Gary Kidwell, Patricia Payuyo, Bernice Rivera Martinez, Stacy Shelton, Bill Spangler-Dunning and Sharon Coleman, Staff.

The General Assembly Futuring Task Force accomplished its work via conference calls. We reviewed the background and history of General Assemblies, including materials submitted from the GMP Advisory Committee of the General Board. The GMP Advisory committee conducted a church-wide survey in 2012 to gather input. They had a 22% response rate to the initial survey request (1902 responses from 8832 requests). Some conclusions of the survey were:

- The General Assembly should remain on a two-year rotation.
- The purpose of General Assembly is to increase the community of Disciples who own the whole mission of the church.
- The addition of a new position of moderator-elect to the moderator team.
- Cost is an issue related to attendance and must be addressed.
- The program and purpose of GA must continually be evaluated in order to be of maximum value to participants.
- The survey also indicated that “business” is less appealing than worship and equipping for mission as reasons to attend.

The team also reviewed a survey conducted by the Professional Convention Management Association and other national convention organizations. The Decision to Attend Study — Phase One, published late January 2015, is designed as a desktop reference and is the first in a series of reports that focus on the myriad of behavioral and societal factors that comprise the reasons individuals decide to attend — or not attend — conventions & exhibitions. It takes responses from 7,171 prospective or current attendees of conventions and establishes a baseline from which to continually measure the influencers and barriers to attending.

The summary indicated key drivers for attendance are as follows, in order of importance:

- Relevant and current education.
- Networking opportunities (most important for Millennials who are just

starting to build their networks).

- Location (over ½ of respondents said they would extend their stay and bring someone with them if the location was a good one – most true of Millennials - 85% - location must have very good digital information about other sites and things to do).
- Social Interaction (Face to face valued greater than social media in all four generations)
- Key drivers for attendance barriers are as follows, in order of importance:
- Cost (This was true both for people who pay their own way and for those who must 'get approval' to attend)
- Time (Both difficulty getting away and timing were mentioned)
- Location

Recommendations:

Hopes for New General Assembly

- Lower cost to encourage more people to attend.
- Create more places for specific ministries, groups, events to occur in a “festival like setting” to widen the reasons for a larger percentage of church members to attend.
- Create a stronger pathway for vibrant congregational and regional ministries to be shared and validated with the whole church.
- Create an environment that promotes more interaction with the whole church through multiple experiences/events in one space as well as intentional opportunity for common worship and relationship building.
- Create an event that brings together the best of the Whole Body of who we are into one space/time with the abiding hope that this will encourage organic connections and relationships.
- Create an event/environment that young families will find inviting and worthy to attend.
- Create an event that enhances the “Reunion” feeling while also creating other entry points for new people to make connections.
- Create an overall path that builds participation toward the General Assembly by encouraging Regional Assemblies to gather and encourage their best ministries. Encourage multiple events/groups to meet as part of a Regional Assembly. This would create less of a Regional Meeting and more of a Gathering of the Ministries of the Region.
- Ensure every component of the event, including evening worship, celebrate and highlight mission in its various forms throughout the life of the church.

The goal is to give more members more reasons to attend. There's a need to refocus the attention of the programming so that it includes personal growth for all attendees as

well as an opportunity for the General Church ministries to do their work. The assembly has done this in recent years by offering continuing education units. How can we continue to improve the quality of the education by including other certification tracks for clergy, lay leaders and guests while at the same time improving the opportunities for networking? There's also a growing need for networking. The new formation seeks to provide intentional opportunities for networking or access to experts who address burning issues that attendees are facing.

Create a road map to assemblies for congregations –

- Encourage local congregations to network together annually or biennially.
- Encourage regional assemblies to organize their assemblies as “celebratory” events. The regional assembly will host as many “typical” regional events as possible. This will allow for less travel for members and will increase attendance at regional assemblies.
 - One component of the regional assembly can be a Mission Fest where congregations/ministries share ideas that are new, exciting and effective. Each regional assembly will select one congregation/ministry to forward to the General Assembly to share with the larger church.
 - Youth will also be encouraged to participate at the regional and national level.

Equipping the Saints

Quality education and learning opportunities are expected at the assembly. To achieve this, the task force recommends that each entity listed below be invited to submit proposals for education at the assembly. We also suggest that each group assist with the promotion of the assembly and their education event. The General Assembly planning committee will receive and approve education proposals. We suggest submitting, reviewing and approval of proposals 18 months before an assembly. The goal is to equip attendees to prepare them for lifelong work in their local congregation, region and community.

- Regions – Regional ministers collaborate to present the best of their regions to the General Assembly. This could be achieved by selecting the best presentation from their regional big tent event or as determined by the College of Regional Ministers. The regions would be responsible for managing this offering at each assembly. By discerning the needs of congregations and what ministry in vibrant congregations looks like, regional leaders will present the best of the best to the assembly.
 - Center of the exhibit hall will be a Mission Fest at each assembly. This will place an emphasis on mission and its importance in the life of the denomination.
- General Ministries – the Cabinet (to include the Racial and Ethnic leaders) are aware of the needs of their constituencies and the church at large. Using this

knowledge and evaluating the trends in current society, the general ministry leaders or their designated staff will present a proposal for each assembly. The General Ministry group will work together to develop the educational offerings in their section of the event. Racial and Ethnic ministry leaders would create offerings which would serve their constituency in a way that enriches the body of the church.

- o The task force suggests that current and new events hosted by general ministries can be offered at the assembly. (i.e. DOM/Global Ministries Missionworks conference, Children's Welcome Conference, Across the Generations Faith Formation Gathering, etc.). By offering these events as a part of the General Assembly there could be a cost saving for attendees.
- ICYF – each assembly, youth from around the life of the church are invited to attend this event under the big tent. The focus will be equipping youth to be leaders of the church. A component can include a college fair as well as learning opportunities for youth to equip them to be Christian leaders every day. The region where the assembly is held will lead the youth programming and provide support.
- Associations/affinity groups (1 ½ day retreats). This can include men's groups, ICWF, ADM, Bethany Fellows, etc.

The task force believes that we should anticipate and expect gifts of leadership to come from everywhere and anywhere throughout the church. Because of this, we recommend that assembly be open to all applications to lead retreats, experiences, and/or educational experiences that may arise.

Members of congregations need to be encouraged to share their experiences and ministry ideas at both the Regional and General Assembly events. Until congregations feel they are deeply valued and needed by the general church, there is not a driving incentive for congregations to attend. By simply creating a multi-directional flow of sharing we believe that the General Assembly will grow both in numbers and increase the strength and health of the whole church.

Impacting the cost of the event

- Instruct the Office of General Minister and President's staff to pursue corporate sponsors to help reduce the cost to attendees. The staff will work with a team of 1-3 General Ministry Presidents, or others as necessary, to ensure that the sponsoring organizations/companies are not in direct conflict with the theology, mission or vision of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
- Instruct the Office of General Minister and President's staff to find a way to reduce the overall cost of the event by:
 - o Considering multiyear agreements with cities to have greater negotiating power.
 - o Considering second and third tier cities. These cities should have access

to an international airport and low cost airline carriers.

- Instruct the Office of General Minister and President's staff to research and publish lower cost housing options.
- To end the General Assembly at noon on the closing day. This will save attendees one-night hotel stay.

Promotion & Marketing

The assembly needs increased visibility in the life of the church. The General Assembly office is instructed to create a team that include representatives from each expression in the life of the church to create a communication plan for each General Assembly. This step is crucial to the growth of the assembly.

This plan should detail:

- the steps necessary to educate members on the assembly;
- a process to reach and add new attendees to the event each biennium;
- a method of tracking and identifying areas of growth;
- the execution of the plan for the next assembly should begin on the last day of the current assembly.

Next Steps

To recommend that the General Assembly planning group manage this process in partnership with other ministries, groups and associations beginning in 2019.

The General Board has reviewed GA-1736 from the General Assembly Futuring Task Force. The report is submitted to the General Assembly for presentation and discussion. No action is required. (Discussion time: 12 minutes)