

Let's Go Deeper...
Wednesday, July 12, 2017
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Jennie and I have been in Indianapolis the past five days at the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) with 4,000 or so of our closest friends.



I say that only half tongue-in-cheek. Having grown up in this church and served it in ministry now for 35 years, I know a lot of Disciples. Every other year when we gather for General Assembly, Jennie and I reap the harvest of relationships formed in Christ. *Blest be the tie that binds.*

What was the highlight of this assembly? Hmm.

The renewing of lifelong friendships is right up there.

Having eight of our high school youth attend with sponsors Diane Ballard and Kelly Henderson is high on the list. Spending time with them over dinner and in worship was a blessing. Be proud, Central, of the manner in which your young people comported themselves. They regaled me with stories of their serving for 4 hours at the Gleaners Food Bank, sleeping on the floor of Geist Christian Church (where Central's own Sarah Renfro is on staff), and traversing the high ropes course and zip line at an Indy outdoor adventure park. They all chimed in on the Sunday morning sermon preached by North Carolina Disciple Dr. William Barber at Indianapolis' historic Central Christian Church, offering thoughtful analysis of his content as well as his rhetorical flourish. I am proud to be one of their pastors.

Seeing the diversity of our larger church family always swells my heart and broadens my vision. Disciples are Korean, Haitian, Hispanic, South Pacific Islander, African- and European-American. I know them by the names of Jae, Chemiste, Ailsa, Sarasopa, and Virzola (and was very grateful for the oversized name tags we wore around our necks to trigger my memory).

Nightly worship emerging from the gifts and styles of such a wide swath of ethnicities, traditions, and generations awakened and stretched my soul.

Jennie and I ate meals with friends old and new. Disciples are indeed "People of the Table."

All of the above were highlights of the 2017 General Assembly, but the two things that move me most and did so again this year are the Memoriam time at the

beginning of the Tuesday Night Worship Service and the altar call for prayer at its end.

There is nothing fancy about the Memorial time. The lights dim. Music is played. Then, the names of men and women who have died since the last assembly, pastors and their spouses, scroll across the screen. I have reached the age I know many of the names. I looked up to them as a young pastor. I was blessed to know them as colleagues as I aged and matured. In the latter years of my active ministry, I hope to finish the race with the integrity and ongoing vitality with which they did. Seeing names that are now a part of that "great cloud of witnesses" always brings a tear to my eye. I saw Wayne Bell's name this year... and wept.

The Tuesday Evening service closes with an invitation to come forward for prayer. The two dozen or so Regional Ministers take their places around the perimeter of the assembly floor wearing their stoles, standing at the ready to pray for whoever comes to them. Tables are placed around the floor to which persons step up and light a votive candle in intercessory prayer.

It is a moving sight to see hundreds of people stream out of the bleachers and rise from their chairs on the floor to make their way for prayer.

I rose from my place among our youth in the bleachers, descended to the floor level, and found the Rev. John Mobley, a fellow Vanderbilt Divinity School grad and now Regional Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Alabama and Northwest Florida.

He took my hand and asked, "David, for what can I pray?"

"For the continued renewal and vitality of Central Christian."

With that, he prayed for me-- for *us*-- and anointed my head with oil.

I wove my way through the other prayer pilgrims, found a seat, and continued in intercessory prayer for the members of Central on our prayer list.

It's been a good assembly.

I'm ready to come home to Central.

See you Sunday.