

What Happens - and When - at a General Assembly

Adapted from an article by Rev. James R. Tony

General Assembly schedules vary from year to year, but the flow of events generally goes like this:

Saturday

The Assembly begins! The exhibit hall will be open that day, so be sure to walk that area and see how varied the exhibits are. You will need to register and pay a small fee if you wish to attend committee meetings or sit in on plenary as an observer. If you would like to testify before a committee, remember to check the posted sign-up schedule in the registration area. (Your testimony in committee can be invaluable to the committee's further work, and to the outcome of the Assembly meeting.)

Registration for commissioners and visitors is a time of reunions, checking to see who has made it and hallway rumor-mongering – great fun for political junkies. It also provides some opportunity to get acquainted with moderatorial candidates, who will be available to greet their admirers, detractors and questioners.

Early Saturday afternoon, the Assembly convenes officially. Surprises sometimes emerge during the adoption of the Standing Rules for Order at the General Assembly. You will want to get acquainted with the contents of the whole [Manual of the General Assembly](#) if you are going to follow the committee procedures and the floor process. The G.A. Moderator will be elected Saturday evening. Watching how the balloting goes gives a clue about the strengths of the various factions at the G.A.

Sunday

Sunday is a work day at the Assembly. There will be an opening Communion Service in the morning, and committees begin meeting that afternoon. They begin with a closed session (for no longer than one hour) and are then opened to observers.

Monday

Committee hearings usually happen early in the committee process. Pay attention to when they are scheduled in the committee where you wish to testify and be present on time. Committees will meet all day today.

Tuesday

Committees will continue meeting until late afternoon, but pay careful attention: a committee may decide it needs more time to complete its business. If that is the case, it will meet into the evening and may meet again on Wednesday morning.

Wednesday

There will be an ecumenical worship service in the morning, then “free time” for most commissioners. In the afternoon, plenary begins. Committees will begin to report and the commissioners will remain in plenary (whole body) for the rest of their meeting. Watch for special agenda slots for certain items of business. For most of the business, however, the routine is for committees to report in the order in which they finish their work so that the committee reports are available in time for floor action. Committees are given one hour in which to complete their reports, including discussion on their recommendations. Further action on a committee's report can then only be taken if the house decides to change its rules or if the committee waits till the end of all other action to complete its report.

Thursday - Friday

The Assembly continues in plenary session. The exhibit area probably will close sometime during the day on Thursday.

Saturday

The Assembly adjourns about noon. There are often Saturday morning surprises – like motions to reconsider – so if you come, plan to stay for it all!

For general information about the G.A. this year: registration, housing, business, resources, etc., go to <http://www.pcusa.org/ga219/>