General Conference Reflection

Deb Angerman

I went to General Conference with a lot of dread. The 2016 conference - and especially 2019 Special Called Conference – nearly broke me and that was just from watching the live streams. To be there in person, with who knows what protests and special interest groups might be there… I really questioned my ability to be able to go through that and remain a person of faith. I was grateful that Kim and Brian would be there, so that I would have people in my tribe to turn to if things went south. But that ended up being unnecessary.

General Conference 2020/2024 turned out to be a lovefest. Yes, much of it was a business meeting, but it was the first time I truly experienced what I'd always imagined John Wesley meant when he spoke about "Christian conferencing" being means of grace. In 2012 Bishop Sally Dyck of the Northern Illinois Conference wrote that holy conferencing is reflected *"in our speech and our actions and our relationships, we're looking for a more excellent way in ... how we treat each other."* When I read that the first time, I thought "that's nice," but nothing I'd ever experienced outside of an Emmaus gathering.

And yet, there I was with people on the right, people on the left, and people in the middle all working together for that which held all of us together: God, Three-In-One. I had been worried about being surrounded by all those different kinds of people, but it turned out that we were one big circle of humanity, surrounding the Godhead. Jesus was the center and the Holy Spirit bound us all together.

Everyone there who had been to General Conference before, spoke about the marked difference in the *feeling* of this General Conference. In general, people were not there to be <u>right</u> or cause harm to each other, but to fix what was broken in a spirit of love. I understand that there were a few folks there who had come to wreak havoc, but those intentions were unsustainable in the midst of that kind of love. In light of everything that's happening in the outside world, this was so refreshing that it was almost overwhelming. I made a lot of new friends during those two weeks… people on the right, people on the left, and people in the middle. I discovered that we are not so very different after all.

Driving home from General Conference I was filled with a new-found hope. For my church and for my country. I knew that I would face backlash from friends and family who have different understandings of scripture, but it didn't matter. Moments before we went into the hall for our first day of General Conference, the Virginia Delegation gathered for a short devotional and prayer. After a reading of scripture, we were instructed to turn to another member of the delegation and ask for a specific prayer. I asked that I might be brave. Which sounds silly, now, sitting here at my desk a week after the final day of General Conference. But God answered that prayer and continues to fill me with courage I never had before to speak up for the marginalized, the powerless, the "other." I am them and they are me. General Conference 2020/2024 gave me that understanding, and I will be forever thankful.