

The Irony of the 219th General Assembly

By P.J. Southam

Commissioners to the just concluded 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) had several opportunities to take a strong stand for the unborn, and for those who carry them. The results were a very mixed bag.

Several overtures and one commissioner's resolution came before the Assembly, asking them to affirm God's claim upon the unborn children of believers, to stand against forced and coerced abortion, to condemn violence against pregnant women, and to end the Board of Pension's paying for abortions. This General Assembly rejected or modified these requests.

However, this General Assembly did affirm the "Charter for Compassion", which reads in part:

"The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

"It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain."

This General Assembly also affirmed the Covenant with Children, to celebrate the Decade of the Child. Part of this affirmation was reciting a litany of dedication, written by Rev. Cindy Cushman, which contains these affirmations:

"All children are a gift of God, created by God, and created good." "We hope for a world where all children can find a safe place."

The womb is intended to be a safe place for children for their first nine months of development. Unfortunately, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) didn't seem fit to affirm that clearly or consistently.