

Reflections of a Vice-Moderator

by Ann Beran Jones

As a commissioner to the 214th General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio last year, I was honored to place the name of the Reverend Dr. Fahed Abu-Akel into nomination before the 214th General Assembly. When Fahed Abu-Akel was elected on the second ballot, I assumed that my relationship to the new Moderator would be that of other commissioners—a voting delegate sitting with my Chicago Presbytery delegation.

I was overwhelmed by the whispered invitation on Sunday morning at the assembly to be appointed as Vice-Moderator! After a few hours of thought and conversation and prayer, I accepted Fahed's invitation. I have been privileged and honored to serve with our first Palestinian American Moderator "for such a time as this."

During the assembly, I enjoyed sharing in the Moderator's duties with Fahed and working with the Office of the Stated Clerk. A whole village of people assisted behind the scenes to make that large deliberative body work smoothly. Fahed's hospitable personality set a wonderful tone for the assembly; fortunately, my experiences as a Churchwide Presbyterian Women Vice-Moderator and Moderator of Chicago Presbytery provided me with some confidence for working with such a large group.

What are the continuing responsibilities of the office of Vice-Moderator? The office is not a constitutional one. It is an appointed, not an elected position. The appointee serves at the request of the Moderator during the Moderator's term of service. The role and responsibilities vary depending on the desires and needs of the Moderator. There is no job description. Contrary to what many people assume, there is no budget for the office of the Vice-Moderator. There is no formal way to be involved in the work of the church during the year, such as occasionally attending the General Assembly Council or going on informational mission trips or being involved in decision making. There is no budget or invitation to the following General Assembly. I hope that the office of Vice-Moderator receives some careful attention, especially when we have assemblies every other year. I think a multiyear strategy for the travel and appearances of the Moderator and/or Vice-Moderator would be wise.

I have made a great effort to stay informed throughout the year, and it has been an immense privilege to represent Moderator Fahed Abu-Akel and the General Assembly when requested. Beyond several responsibilities in the Chicago area, I have traveled to Orlando, Florida for a new immigrant conference; to Louisville, Kentucky to share in leadership in the Moderator's Conference; the Presbyteries of Mackinaw and South Louisiana; and the presidential inauguration at St. Andrew's Presbyterian College in North Carolina. Other invitations were made directly to me by the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii Justice for Women's event; First Presbyterian Church of Rochester, Minnesota; Presbyterian Women in Mid-Kentucky Presbytery and Owensboro, Kentucky; McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago; and Blackhawk

Presbytery. I have enjoyed wearing the stole given to me by the Youth Advisory Delegates at the conclusion of the 214th General Assembly, which combines the symbols of Presbyterian Women, PC(USA), Palestinian needlework, and pieced fabrics representing the rich diversity of the church.

Whenever one travels in the church, there is a sense of vibrancy in mission. I experienced this in dramatic ways during my three years as Vice-Moderator of Presbyterian Women (1997-2000), and have had the same feeling this year as Vice-Moderator of the General Assembly. There is a warm welcome and gratitude for the relationship of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in each gathering. I was also pleased to report on the work of the 214th General Assembly and the conciliatory manner of the assembly, focused on the Lordship of Jesus Christ and pastoral approaches to controversy in the church. Fahed Abu-Akel is a reconciling presence wherever he goes, and I tried to exemplify that when I represented him. He is dedicated to peacemaking and mission and hospitality, and our church and our world desperately need that vision and encouragement and model as we face issues of war and peace and reconciliation. I was particularly conscious of the Palestinians during this year of Fahed's leadership. He was born in Galilee and lived through the early terror of the state of Israel, became a refugee, then through missionary women became a Presbyterian who came and stayed in the United States. He has been an effective spokesperson for peace and justice during this incredibly difficult period of Middle East history.

It has been a unique honor to serve the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as Vice-Moderator. It was an experience far beyond any of my expectations for service in the church. I will enjoy its memories the rest of my life. I am grateful to our Moderator, the Reverend Dr. Fahed Abu-Akel, for his invitation and for the privilege of serving with him this year.