1. Annual Session Planning Process: The Annual Session Planning Committee had its first meeting on January 5 on the campus of Pacific University to begin getting familiar with the venue we would use this year. Two more meetings were held at the Multnomah Meeting House in February and March, and several more were held by conference call beginning in late March and running to June. Several on the committee visited the site on two additional occasions to second guess earlier decisions about room choices and visualize activities. Most committee members preferred the face-to-face meetings. By the time the general planning was done following the March meeting, the conference calls between members over issues that did not need the full committee were appropriate.

Two major issues remained unresolved into June. One was where the plenary sessions and community night would be held; this was resolved as we could project an attendance of less than 300. The second regarded the needs and spaces of the children’s program, due to incomplete communication or misunderstanding within the Committee. Unless there is a major jump in attendance our solutions to the issues should be repeatable next year.

2. The Host--Pacific University: The conference services staff at Pacific U. were easy to work with, once you got their attention. On several occasions, there were delays in returning calls or requests for information, starting in the fall of 2012, and particularly after AS ended in 2013. Lois Hornberger, head of conference services, delegated an assistant, Kelly Leavitt, to work out details with our ASPC members. (Kelly left her position after AS and has been replaced with Wanda Frasier.) Once AS was underway, we were able to get responses to immediate issues fairly quick.

Pacific U required an emergency plan for what to do in emergencies. Lew Scholl (Assistant GA clerk and Assistant Phys. Arr. Clerk) took on the task of preparing text and maps for materials to be in the possession of people responsible for each floor of residence halls so that, in an emergency, we could account for everyone.

The financial aspect of being at Pacific was simple. They had reasonable charges for meals and dorm space, and a flat site fee per day that included use of spaces and AV equipment--no itemizing that we experienced at other institutions. A 10% discount was given for people who took the “full package.” We did not realize that savings for commuters and those not eating all meals. Pacific billed according to their fee plan; the AS adjusted the charges for other objectives, explained in the Fee Setting section below. A payment to NPYM from the food service for savings generated with the simple meal, which should have been made at the time Pacific’s final invoice was received, is supposed to be made before September 15, 2013.

3. Pacific University--the Venue: Twenty of the 78 evaluations turned in at the end AS
contained written comments about the compactness and beauty of the campus. So little use was made of the one golf cart that its need was questioned. Next year the ordering of a golf cart should be done upon determining, from requests at registration, that such assistance is needed. It could be a specific request on the registration form.

The University Center had an excellent arrangement of several functions. Immediately adjacent to the cafeteria were spaces for registration, the display area for organizations, and a lockable room for the book store. Two separate rooms adjacent to the cafeteria were perfect for committees that needed to meet during meals. A small room for a quiet space for families with little children was available. Our plenary session space was downstairs. The Children’s Program took place in an adjacent building. Central Friends, Junior Friends and Young Adult Friends had lounge spaces in residence halls for their gathering spots.

We used three dorms and were able to get people with mobility issues assigned to rooms not needing elevators or stair access. In the newer hall, there were units with kitchens, suitable for use by families with special dietary needs or schedules. Clark Hall had some complaints of beds being too high for some, a couple of deficiencies in restrooms, and the elevator not being accessible without and attendant. This was mainly a problem for people moving luggage in at the beginning and out at the end of AS. Next year there should be a volunteer position to be an elevator monitor at appropriate times.

The room judged most suitable for our plenary sessions had a requirement that for 200 or more chairs, they be made immovable by lashing them together in threes. Desiring seating for at least 250, we opted to have chairs lashed together. Having not provided a seating plan in advance, the chairs needed to be rearranged before our first plenary, and then again to make room for a dance, then again for a circle for the final meeting for worship. Many of the little zip-ties used to hold chairs together broke as chairs got moved.

Conference services director Lois Hornberger registered her displeasure over chair separations, citing fire marshal issues. The room limit posting is for 297 occupants. I said that if we could not get by with 199 chairs on the floor and 20 on the stage that next year we would use the more distant auditorium that seats 400.

Accessibility for the alter-abled was generally adequate. Wheel chair bound attendees have a long circuitous outside route to get from the plenary room to the dining room. A special tip sheet for those with accessibility problems would be a good insert into on-site registration packets.

Two major complaints listed on evaluations were the lack of air conditioning at times in the plenary room, and the conflict with an antique car show on the final day. The conference center director has confirmed that we can move our date for 2014 to one week later--July 23 - 27--avoiding the car show.

In my estimation, this venue could accommodate up to 350 attendees without needing extra rooms for small worship groups.
4. Fee setting: Great consideration was giving to making AS more family friendly in terms of cost. To that end, we produced a fee schedule where Junior Friends and younger did not have to pay Pacific’s site fee ($11 per day) or the AS program fee ($19), a $30 per day total. Young Adult Friends did not pay the $11 per day site. Additionally, Pacific U. charged children under age 10 at the rate of $2 per day per year of age; i.e., a 4 year old was charged $8 per day for meals and lodging and no site fee. This fee structure allowed reduced charges for youths before the family cap took effect. The resultant adult pricing still ended up several dollars less than at PLU in 2012.

The full time package rate offered by Pacific was not passed onto those who signed up for “the full meal deal.” Excesses were used to subsidize the youth costs.

5. Registration: The Registrar reported that 282 people registered, which happened to be one below the number used in putting together the budget for this annual session. A small percentage of the people still have trouble dealing with registration information electronically. Most find it satisfactory.

We maxed out spaces for youth programs, and almost maxed out spaces for non-walking worship groups. Allowing for worship groups with up to 12 people, I estimate that AS could have accommodated 350 people without feeling squeezed.

6. Program: Worship groups and interest groups worked out fairly well. The Program Coordinator wrote up an excellent report with what worked well and what could use improvement. This year’s Program Coordinator returns to that roll again in 2014 and should help with fine tuning to make for a great Annual Session.

7. Food: Generally very positive comments. People with specific dietary needs complained about a lack of vegetarian proteins at some meals, and a lack of labeling to identify special provisions. Feedback ranged from best ever to poor for variety and quality.

8. Spiritual content: Evaluations revealed that many people were feeling that less time should be spent on business and process matters, and more time to subjects of spiritual significance and unprogrammed time for individual sharing.

9. AS Evaluations: A previous year’s evaluation was modified slightly for 2013. In particular, a new question was added regarding plans to attend in the following year. Someone pointed out that a mail-in address was not given, and that having the evaluation on line to fill out and send as an attachment in would be convenient.

The Annual Session Planning Committee has received much constructive feedback on our 2013 Annual Session and looks forward to using it to make the 2014 Annual Session even better.
Respectfully submitted,
John Etter, General Arrangements Clerk