

Reflections on The 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention (Part I of II)  
By Bishop William Love

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is wonderful to be home. The Albany Deputation and I returned home late Saturday night, July 18th, after having spent 13 days (including travel time) in Anaheim, CA, attending the 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church. I am very thankful for and appreciative of each member of our Deputation, all of whom did an outstanding job representing not only the Diocese of Albany, but also the conservative orthodox voice still in The Episcopal Church. Although clearly in the minority, we spoke with conviction, but also with love and charity. The Albany Deputation was represented by Fr. Scott Garno, the Rev. Canon Robert Haskell, Mother Ellen Neufeld, Fr. John Scott, Dave Beaulac, Debbie Fish, Sue Ellen Ruetsch and Beth Strickland. While not part of the official deputation, Fr. Chip Strickland (our Diocesan Chancellor) and Sarah Garno also attended and were a real blessing, supporting the team in a variety of ways. Fr. Chip did an excellent job in his daily updates, helping to keep each of you informed about what was occurring at General Convention.

In writing this, I have struggled with knowing how much detail to add versus just giving my reflections. Recognizing that not everyone will have access to as much information as others, I have decided to err on the side of those who may need more background information. For those who don't need as much information, please forgive me if I am covering things you already know. While I encourage you to read this in its entirety, the last couple of pages contain my thoughts about the potential impact some of the actions of the 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention may have on the Diocese of Albany and the larger Church.

For those who may not be familiar with the legislative process of the General Convention, it is made up of two Houses, the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies. Currently any bishop active or retired has a seat, voice and vote in the House of Bishops. The House of Deputies is comprised of eight representatives (4 clergy and 4 laity) from each of the 110 dioceses (foreign and domestic) making up The Episcopal Church. For any piece of legislation to be enacted, it must receive a majority affirmative vote in both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops.

By the end of the tenth and final day of General Convention, if the report I heard is accurate, (personally I lost count), we had dealt with over 400 separate resolutions. Many were passed, some defeated, and all the rest referred back to committee either to die in committee or be brought back at some future time. Many of the resolutions, although important to those who moved them, in the grand scheme of things will have little if any impact especially in areas of national and international affairs. Consequently we spent a great deal of time debating and voting on resolutions that will do little more than provide a written record in the Convention Journal of the mood and opinion of the majority of those attending the 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention.

With that said, there were resolutions and pieces of legislation that do impact us as a Diocese, as well as impacting The Episcopal Church at large and the wider Anglican Communion. While I can't reference each of them, I will try to touch on some of the more significant resolutions.

The two resolutions that ultimately captured the most headlines and will most likely have the greatest impact on The Episcopal Church's relationship with the wider Anglican Communion are D025 and C056. Both resolutions deal with different aspects of the ongoing debate concerning those individuals living in homosexual relationships. The text of these two resolutions, B033 from the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention in 2009, and the Anaheim Statement (House of Bishops minority report on D025 and C056) is included at the very end of this statement.

The first three resolves of D025 speak of The Episcopal Church's desire to remain part of and "*live into the highest degree of communion possible*" with the wider Anglican Communion. The fourth resolve reaffirms the value of "*listening to the experience of homosexual persons,*" and The Episcopal Church's commitment to that process. Unfortunately, based on the actions of this church, I believe we don't seem quite as committed to listening to our brothers and sisters in Christ within The Episcopal Church, the Anglican Communion, and the wider Body of Christ who in good conscience cannot support or embrace homosexual relationships (making a clear distinction between individuals of homosexual orientation and homosexual relationships or lifestyles). The fifth and sixth resolves speak of the part homosexuals living in life long committed relationships have played in the life and ministry of the Church, stating that "*God has called and may call such individuals, to any ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church.*" The final resolve acknowledges the ongoing division over these issues within The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, stating that we "*are not of one **mind**, and Christians of good conscience disagree about some of these matters.*"

Unlike B033 (passed at the 2006 General Convention) which urged The Episcopal Church to "*exercise restraint*" in giving further consents to any bishops "*whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church,*" D025 makes no mention of "*exercising restraint*" and essentially opens the door for the election and consent of future bishops "*whose manner of life*" would present a challenge to the wider church, as has already been witnessed by the repeated requests of the vast majority of the Primates of the wider Anglican Communion not to ordain individuals living in homosexual relationships or to bless such relationships.

Resolution C056 calls for the "*Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops [to] collect and develop theological and liturgical resources*" for the blessing of same gender relationships, and report to the 77<sup>th</sup> General Convention. In addition it states, "*That bishops, particularly in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral responses to meet the needs of members of this Church.*"

There is great concern by many to include myself, that D025 and C056, while not officially calling for the repeal of B033 (as some had wanted), does in effect repudiate B033 by allowing for the ordination of individuals living in homosexual relationships; calling for the development of liturgies for the blessing of homosexual relationships; and for officially authorizing bishops to "*provide generous pastoral responses*" i.e. allow for the blessing of homosexual relationships in whatever form that might take. All of these are in direct opposition to that which was asked of us in the Windsor Report, not to mention by the four Instruments of Communion (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates of the Anglican Communion, the Anglican Consultative Council, and Lambeth Conference). While proclaiming our desire to remain part of the Anglican

Communion, D025 and C056 make it clear that it will be on our terms. Actions speak louder than words.

B033, as imperfect as it was, offered enough to keep the Archbishop of Canterbury from breaking ties with The Episcopal Church. It is still yet to be seen, what impact the passage of D025 and C056 will have regarding The Episcopal Church's future relationship with Archbishop Rowan Williams and the wider Anglican Communion. Addressing the 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention, the Archbishop cautioned against making "*decisions...that could push us further apart.*" Unfortunately, with the passage of these two resolutions, The Episcopal Church has done exactly what the Archbishop cautioned us not to do. Twenty two of the 37 other Provinces of the Anglican Communion have already declared themselves to be in a state of impaired or broken communion with the majority of The Episcopal Church. Others, to include the Archbishop of Canterbury, may very well follow as a result of the above actions. Time will tell.

There has been an ongoing call throughout the Anglican Communion, for The Episcopal Church to provide "clarity" as to what it truly believes and its response to that which has been asked of it by the wider Anglican Communion regarding the issues which divide us. The passage of D025 and C056 would seem to provide the clarity that many have been asking for. However, the spin from some deputies and bishops concerning these resolutions continues to muddy the water and send mixed messages. It was stated by several bishops during the debate on D025, that while the resolution does allow for a person living in a homosexual relationship to be elected and serve as bishop, until such a person is elected and ordained, B033 has not been overturned. Unfortunately, I believe such mixed signals will only add to the growing charge of hypocrisy aimed at The Episcopal Church, as a result of our saying one thing, but doing something different.

So what does the passage of these two resolutions mean for the Diocese of Albany? In the sense of providing clarity, it clarifies what we already knew – the theologically conservative and orthodox views of the two-thirds majority of the Diocese of Albany are clearly in the minority when compared to the current leadership of the rest of The Episcopal Church. I believe it will make it more difficult for some who have contemplated leaving The Episcopal Church over these issues to stay, thus jeopardizing the stability and health of our parishes and the Diocese as a whole. I believe it will further frustrate those in the Diocese who favor D025 and C056 wishing that Albany would go in a more liberal direction – something that I cannot and will not support as your bishop because I do not believe it is in accordance with God's will or in the best interest of His Church. I believe it will tempt some on both sides of these issues to withhold financial support, out of protest, thus negatively impacting the life and ministry of the local parishes and the Diocese. Ultimately, I believe it is going to make my job as your bishop all the more difficult as I try to discern God's will in knowing how best to lead the Diocese during these difficult and confusing times, sharing "in the leadership of the Church" with my fellow bishops in The Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion as "one with the apostles...called to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church."(BCP 517). I value and ask for your continued prayers. Finally, I believe it could jeopardize the Diocese of Albany's communion status with the wider Anglican Communion, if our Anglican brothers and sisters in Christ fail to differentiate between those in The Episcopal Church who have honored and upheld that which

has been asked of us by the Anglican Communion and those who have gone in a different direction.

Admittedly, I have just painted a less than favorable, but what I believe to be an honest assessment of what could happen as a result of the passage of D025 and C056. The good news is that what could happen, DOES NOT have to happen. Ultimately, the impact D025 and C056 has on each of us individually; our parishes and the Diocese will be dependent upon how we choose to respond. While both resolutions open the door for The Episcopal Church to continue to go in a direction that I believe is problematic for all the reasons listed above, neither resolution changes the Constitution or Canons of The Episcopal Church, nor do they require us, as the Diocese of Albany, to be anything other than who and what we are.

By the grace of God, the Diocese of Albany will: continue to uphold the traditional orthodox teachings of the Church; fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, moving from membership to discipleship, equipping, emboldening, and sending disciples to make disciples; proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of the world – the Way, the Truth and the Life, the only One through whom salvation is possible; recognizing the authority of Holy Scripture; continuing in the apostles' teaching and fellowship; upholding the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed; teaching that marriage was designed and intended by God to be a life long covenant relationship between a man and a woman and that it is only within the confines of marriage between a man and woman that the gift of sexual intimacy is appropriately shared; reaffirm our constituent membership in the Anglican Communion, our communion with the See of Canterbury, and our commitment to preserve these relationships; reaffirm our commitment to the three moratoria requested of us by the instruments of Communion; and reaffirm our commitment to the Anglican Communion Covenant process, with the hope of working toward its implementation once completed. In addition, I will be talking to the Standing Committee about ways in which the Diocese of Albany can be intentional about working more closely with those dioceses that share similar conservative, orthodox theological views. While we may be in the minority, we are not alone. It is important that we support and uphold one another, sharing God's truth as best we understand it, in order that we might be an instrument of His love and healing grace in this broken and hurting world in which we live.

I realize that what I have put forward is not going to be easy, given the current state of crisis within The Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion. I don't pretend to know how everything will turn out, or whether The Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion will even survive as we now know them. What I do know, is that what we are experiencing now is nothing new. As I have often said in the past, if you study Church history, you will discover that the Church has had problems from the very beginning. If you are looking for the perfect Church, you won't find it this side of heaven, because the Church is made up of imperfect people. There have always been times of conflict resulting from arguments about theological understandings, false teaching and other concerns introduced by Satan through our fallen human nature. Satan is delighted with the division and fighting going on within the Church. The more he can distract us and turn us against one another, the less effective we will be in sharing the Gospel and bringing people to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Despite the brokenness found in the different parts of the Church down through the centuries, there has always been that faithful remnant in which the Holy Spirit has and will continue to work until our Lord returns. My prayer is that the

Diocese of Albany will be part of that faithful remnant, in whatever form that might take. If we are to do so, it is essential that we stick together and keep our focus on Christ and Christ alone. In so doing we will get through to the other side. If we focus on the storm, it will destroy us. The decision is ours! It is imperative that what ever decisions we make in response to the current crisis within The Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion, be done in prayer, truly seeking God's will and the grace to respond in obedience to His will. Ultimately, our wants and desires are of little consequence. What matters most is what God wants. It is only when we are acting in accordance with His will that we will find true peace and fulfillment.

There were other resolutions and actions taken at the 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention that I need to briefly comment on, however, I will save those for Part II of my reflections on General Convention, to be issued later this week.

Faithfully Yours in Christ,  
+Bill

*The following statement was prepared as a minority report by those bishops who could not support D025 and C056. An open invitation was offered to any other bishops who felt called to sign the statement.*

Thursday, July 16, 2009

Anaheim Statement, General Convention, 2009

At this convention, the House of Bishops has heard repeated calls for honesty and clarity. As the conversation has proceeded within the House of Bishops, repeated attempts to modify wording which would have been preferable to the minority in the vote were respectfully heard and discussed, but in the end most of these amendments were found unacceptable to the majority in the House. Many in the majority believed the amendments would make the stated position of this House less honest about where they believe we are as The Episcopal Church.

It is apparent that a substantial majority of this Convention believes that The Episcopal Church should move forward on matters of human sexuality. We recognize this reality and understand the clarity with which the majority has expressed itself. We are grateful for those who have reached out to the minority, affirming our place in the Church.

We seek to provide the same honesty and clarity. We invite all bishops who share the following commitments to join us in this statement as we seek to find a place in the Church we continue to serve.

- We reaffirm our constituent membership in the Anglican Communion, our communion with the See of Canterbury, and our commitment to preserving these relationships.
- We reaffirm our commitment to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ as this Church has received them (BCP 526, 538).

- We reaffirm our commitment to the three moratoria requested of us by the Instruments of Communion.
- We reaffirm our commitment to the Anglican Communion Covenant process currently underway, with the hope of working toward its implementation across the Communion once a Covenant is completed.
- We reaffirm our commitment to “continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship” which is foundational to our baptismal covenant, and to be one with the apostles in “interpreting the Gospel” which is essential to our work as bishops of the Church of God.

The Rt. **Rev’d** James Adams, Western Kansas  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Lloyd Allen, Honduras  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** David Alvarez, Puerto Rico  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** John **Bauerschmidt**, Tennessee  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Peter Beckwith, Springfield  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Frank **Brookhart**, Montana  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Andrew Doyle, Texas  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Philip Duncan, Central Gulf Coast  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Dan Edwards, Nevada  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** William Frey, Rio Grande  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Dena Harrison, Texas  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Dorsey Henderson, Upper South Carolina  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Julio **Holguin**, Dominican Republic  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** John Howe, Central Florida  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Russell **Jacobus**, Fond du Lac  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Don Johnson, West Tennessee  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Paul Lambert, Dallas  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Mark Lawrence, South Carolina  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Gary **Lillibridge**, West Texas  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Edward Little, Northern Indiana  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** William Love, Albany  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Bruce **MacPherson**, Western Louisiana  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Alfredo **Morante**, **Litoral** Ecuador  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Henry Parsley, Alabama  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** David Reed, West Texas  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** **Sylvestre** Romero, El Camino Real  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Jeffrey **Rowthorn**, Europe  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** William **Skilton**, Dominican Republic  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** John Sloan, Alabama  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** **Dabney** Smith, Southwest Florida  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Michael Smith, North Dakota  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** James Stanton, Dallas  
 The Rt. **Rev’d** Pierre **Whalon**, Europe  
 The Rt. **Rev’d**, Don **Wimberly**, Texas

Final Version - B033 – 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church (2006)

*Resolved*, That the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention receive and embrace The Windsor Report's invitation to engage in a process of healing and reconciliation; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this Convention therefore call upon Standing Committees and bishops with jurisdiction to exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion.

Final Version – D025 – 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church (2009)

*Resolved*, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 76th General Convention reaffirm the continued participation of The Episcopal Church as a constituent member of the Anglican Communion; give thanks for the work of the bishops at the Lambeth Conference of 2008; reaffirm the abiding commitment of The Episcopal Church to the fellowship of churches that constitute the Anglican Communion and seek to live into the highest degree of communion possible; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 76th General Convention encourage dioceses, congregations, and members of The Episcopal Church to participate to the fullest extent possible in the many instruments, networks and relationships of the Anglican Communion; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 76th General Convention reaffirm its financial commitment to the Anglican Communion and pledge to participate fully in the Inter-Anglican Budget; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 76th General Convention affirm the value of "listening to the experience of homosexual persons," as called for by the Lambeth Conferences of 1978, 1988, and 1998, and acknowledge that through our own listening the General Convention has come to recognize that the baptized membership of The Episcopal Church includes same-sex couples living in lifelong committed relationships "characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God" (2000-D039); and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 76th General Convention recognize that gay and lesbian persons who are part of such relationships have responded to God's call and have exercised various ministries in and on behalf of God's One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and are currently doing so in our midst; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 76th General Convention affirm that God has called and may call such individuals, to any ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church, and that God's call to the ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church is a mystery which the Church attempts to discern for all people through our discernment processes acting in accordance with the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the 76th General Convention acknowledge that members of The Episcopal Church as of the Anglican Communion, based on careful study of the Holy Scriptures, and in

light of tradition and reason, are not of one mind, and Christians of good conscience disagree about some of these matters.

Current Version\* – C056 – 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church (2009)

- *A final version is not listed on the General Convention Website as of Monday, July 27, 2009*

•

*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 76th General Convention acknowledge the changing circumstances in the United States and in other nations, as legislation authorizing or forbidding marriage, civil unions or domestic partnerships for gay and lesbian persons is passed in various civil jurisdictions that call forth a renewed pastoral response from this Church, and for an open process for the consideration of theological and liturgical resources for the blessing of same gender relationships; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, collect and develop theological and liturgical resources, and report to the 77th General Convention; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, devise an open process for the conduct of its work inviting participation from provinces, dioceses, congregations, and individuals who are engaged in such theological work, and inviting theological reflection from throughout the Anglican Communion; and be it further

*Resolved*, That bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this Convention honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the members of this Church be encouraged to engage in this effort.