

I have been an Episcopalian since the cradle and when I was elected a deputy for General Convention (GC), I was excited to imagine being in the same place with thousands of fellow Episcopalians. I have gone as a chaperone to Soulfest for three years – a gathering of thousands of Christian youth in Vermont which incorporates prayer with contemporary Christian music. I was always blown away by the presence of the Holy Spirit at this event, and I imagined that it would be similar at General Convention.

We received some preliminary information before GC began such as emails promoting one candidate or another for an office, information on insurance plans, budgets, schedules, directories, etc. and the infamous “Blue Book”. This book contained all the committee reports and resolutions that had been submitted to date, which numbered in the hundreds. It was at times overwhelming. But it was nothing compared to the first day of GC.

To walk into the Anaheim Convention Center and see the mass of people and tables and the two giant (and I mean giant) screens was sensory overflow for me. We were given a massive 4 “ high binder with more resolutions and committee reports, and each day that was added to with more paperwork including calendars and agendas and resolutions to be voted on daily. To say that there was a lot of reading would be a tremendous understatement. Our 10 days started at 6:30 a.m. with Morning Prayer and ended at around 6:00 p.m. or later if there were evening sessions.

I was so proud to be a part of the Albany deputation. Each day our deputation would start out with Morning Prayer, and we would sometimes form a circle at our tables in the Deputies’ Hall and pray for the Holy Spirit to be present in all the proceedings. The sad part is that we were the only deputation that I saw praying.

Each deputation had a post with the diocese name on it, similar to the Democratic or Republican convention posts for each state that you see on television. The Albany Deputation post was decorated with a cross, a beaver and a pine tree, cleverly designed by Mtr. Ellen Neufeld. I mention this only because of all the decorations on all the posts, not one other had a cross on it. There were some with horses, some with umbrellas with party items hanging off of it, one with a

lobster, another with a crab, but no other crosses. This was definitely an indication of the tone of the Convention.

Each business meeting opened with prayer and closed with prayer which was meditation, quotes and thoughts of the chaplain. Each day we had changes in procedure. Unless you were a GC junkie or a student of Robert's Rules of Order, these changes were flying past like the stars seen from a spaceship in warp overdrive. On the first day we passed about a dozen resolutions. On the last day we considered and voted on about 36 resolutions, not including several dozen resolutions that were passed in a single vote called the "Consent Calendar". The resolutions included items that were sometimes directly related to TEC but more often involved matters that were foreign policy or social justice issues with no mention of Jesus Christ or His Commandment or Commission. Such as: 1) "each Episcopalian should be urged to pray during Advent and Christmas for the wall around Bethlehem and all other barriers to come down"; 2) "...urge the PB and the leadership of TEC to use the authority and power of this church and of their offices to actively lobby to .... influence and change the policies and behavior of the Israeli, Palestinian and US governments so as to end the oppressions and the ghetto-ization and to bring the Wall down." 3) "...the Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music to continue to collect, develop and disseminate materials that assist members of the Church to address Christian anti-Judaism expressed in and stirred by portions of Christian scriptures and liturgical texts, including the preparation of a pamphlet explaining Christian anti-Judaism and ways to address it in teaching..... giving special attention to Holy Week and Easter liturgies and to the diverse tradition of song in TEC;" 4) "... direct the Executive Council and Committee on the State of the Church to amend the Parochial Report to include data on the annual energy consumption of electricity, oil, and gas of all Church properties." (I can see the treasurers in the congregations supporting this one!) 5) "...urge the Congress of the US to pass, and the President to sign into law, labor law reform legislation designed to better protect employees seeking to engage in collective bargaining, to simplify and streamline the procedures by which employees may choose to organize and to assist employers and employees in reaching agreement....." One which was too long to restate concerned a request

that a letter be written to the Queen of England requesting that Her Majesty disavow and repudiate publicly, the claimed validity of the Christian Doctrine of Discovery written in 1496. (This came right after the GC had just ignored the Queen's Archbishop of Canterbury's plea to not overturn B033.) It was upsetting to see so much time being spent on social justice issues with little concern for equipping our congregations to go out and spread the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am sure that others will mention the opening statements of the Presiding Bishop which can be read on-line and have been and will continue to be discussed in various venues. Suffice it to say that for me she set the tone for GC by her remarks. Some comments were offensive to individual deputations and some were offensive theologically. In my opinion, all were unnecessary for an opening session which should have been to welcome one and all – inclusivity.

In summary, it was an eye opening experience. This was not the Episcopal Church for which I was hoping and praying. My church is now a social justice machine rather than being centered on Christ and His salvation. It was a sad time for me, but I was pleased to be with my fellow deputies who are faithful to our Lord and who give me optimism for the Diocese of Albany. Perhaps I will return to Soulfeest to be renewed and strengthened.

Elizabeth M. Strickland, Deputy, General Convention 2009