

## REPORT ON GENERAL CONVENTION

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The 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church took place from July 8 to July 17 at the Convention Center in Anaheim, California. Representing the Diocese of Albany were: Bishop William Love, David Beaulac, Deborah Fish, Sue Ellen Ruetsch, Elizabeth Strickland and the Revs. Scott Garno, Robert Haskell, Ellen Neufeld, and John Scott. Fr. Scott was in charge of the Deputation. The Rev. William “Chip” Strickland, Chancellor of the Diocese, was our chaplain. Sarah Garno represented the Diocese of Albany at the UTO Ingathering.

Convention is structured as a bi-cameral legislature, with a House of Bishops and a House of Deputies, the latter being composed of clergy and lay people. The function of a legislature is to pass legislation and so there were plenary sessions of all 800+ Deputies which debated and passed or rejected one piece of legislation after another. These plenary sessions could last up to 6 hours a day. And, like the national House and Senate, there were legislative committees which received testimony on resolutions and wrote the final resolutions which will be considered by the House of Bishops or the House of Deputies. Legislative committees would meet when the House of Deputies was not meeting, typically from 7:30 am to 9 am or from 1 pm to 3 pm.

From the beginning, it was apparent that most of the Deputies were more “liberal” than those of us from Albany. Most legislation was on matters of public policy or international affairs. Some of the topics addressed were: reducing our carbon emissions; endorsing the “Earth Charter”; and asking Queen Elizabeth to forswear the 16<sup>th</sup> century “Doctrine of Discovery”. On most of these topics, I thought we either lacked the competence to address the issue, or we were spending time taking a position which would influence no one.

There were two major resolutions on homosexual behavior. One of them (C056) stated, in part, “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.” What this meant was that bishops should be able to authorize clergy to bless the marriage of two people of the same sex. I believe the reason this resolution doesn’t say this plainly is that the leadership of the Episcopal Church doesn’t want to take the consequences of approving actions which are contrary to the Holy Scriptures, the teaching of the historic church, and the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Bishops. They would like to stay in communion with other Anglican dioceses who hold to the traditional teaching, while supporting homosexual behavior at the same time.

The other resolution was D025 which endorsed the ordination of gay and lesbian persons “living in lifelong, committed relationships.”

Both of these resolutions passed despite the overwhelming biblical teaching to the contrary (the creation of Adam and Eve; Gen 19:1-9; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:24-27; I Corinthians 6:9; I Timothy 1:10; among others.). The deputies from Albany called for a “vote by orders” on these resolutions, which required the motions be passed both by the clergy and by the laity, and required each person to record his/her vote in writing.

Another resolution added dozens of new saints to the calendar of Lesser Feasts and Fasts, so that there

is a saint to commemorate almost every day of the year. What was problematic about this was that several of these people added were not Christians. When asked about this, the Chair of the Standing Liturgical Committee said, “they led good lives that are worthy of imitation.”

One of the feast days proposed was a commemoration of the Virgin Mary, except the word “Virgin” was omitted before “Mary.” Mtr. Ellen Neufeld moved to restore the word “virgin”, pointing out that its omission cast doubt on the divinity of Jesus. Her motion was defeated, which to me was another demonstration of how far the House of Deputies had strayed from orthodox theology.

I was proud of the other deputies from Albany. They were all willing to speak against resolutions which were contrary to Holy Scriptures and the historic teaching of the church. On one resolution every member of the Albany deputation spoke. Most controversial resolutions found two or three of us from Albany standing at the microphones and speaking for the orthodox point of view. There were only a few other dioceses who spoke on the same side of issues as we found ourselves speaking on. We were thankful for the deputies from South Carolina, Central Florida, Springfield, Dallas and Fond du Lac, among others. All of our efforts were supported by the American Anglican Council, which held a Eucharist every day at noon and then served lunch while Chief Operating Officer Rev. Phil Ashey gave a briefing on the progress of resolutions we were interested in.

Two of our deputation served on Convention committees: the Rev. Ellen Neufeld on Constitution and Canons and the Rev. John Scott on Evangelism. The rest of us monitored committees for the AAC or spoke at various committee hearings. This made for long days, but we still got together every morning at 6:30 am to say Morning Prayer under the direction of the Rev. Chip Strickland and to eat breakfast together before going off to committee meetings.

The theme of Convention was “Ubuntu”, an African word which points to the inter-relatedness of Christians. Having made this their theme, however, the Convention seemed unconcerned for their inter-relatedness with other Anglicans, especially those Anglicans who had asked the Episcopal Church to refrain from ordaining clergy who were engaged in homosexual behavior. Appeals by orthodox speakers to heed the Windsor Report which called for a moratorium on these ordinations were ignored.

The Convention began with an address by the Presiding Bishop, the Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori. Troubling was this part of her address, “The overarching connection in all of these crises has to do with the great Western heresy – that we can be saved as individuals, that any of us alone can be in right relationship with God.” This goes against the teaching of the scriptures which is that individuals come into salvation by committing themselves to believe in and follow Jesus. Then, by their connection with Jesus, they are connected to others who believe in Jesus.

Generally, I was discouraged by the overwhelming “liberal” bias of the Convention. Motions on homosexual behavior and other issues which upheld modern liberal religion against orthodox Christianity typically were passed by margins of two-to-one or better. The reason the members of the Albany deputation were able to speak so much was that there were so few others who were willing to take the orthodox side. There were orthodox Christians from other dioceses, however, and I look forward to being in touch with them as we in the Diocese of Albany consider how to remain faithful to Jesus.