

VESTRY PAPERS



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To inform, inspire and affirm Episcopal vestries in their work

General Convention 101

by Mary Frances Schjonberg

Imagine Eucharist for 8,000 people. Imagine a marketplace of goods and ideas. Imagine quiet conversations among friends, old and new. Imagine one of the largest legislatures in the world. Imagine the utter silence of prayer before momentous decisions.

The every-three-years gathering of the Episcopal Church known as General Convention is all of these things. **The 75th gathering begins in Columbus, Ohio, on June 13 and runs until June 21.** Bishops and elected deputies, clergy and lay, from dioceses all over the world will make broad decisions about the church's policies and worship.

The decisions take the form of resolutions agreed to by both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. The House of Deputies ranges in size between 800 and 1,000 members. There are 311 bishops eligible to sit in their house. Resolutions come from the groups which carry out the work authorized by the previous convention, bishops, dioceses, provinces and deputies.

Committees hear public testimony on all resolutions before they come to the houses.

Deputies cannot be instructed to vote one way or another. They agree to have an open heart so that they can prayerfully listen to others and be led by the Holy Spirit. Neither can they refuse to vote on an issue.

We can predict some of the issues a convention will face. Others will arise spontaneously. Here are some of the decisions facing this Convention.

† **Elect the 26th Presiding Bishop** to succeed Frank T. Griswold and **elect a new House of Deputies president** to succeed the Very Rev. George W. Werner. The holders of both offices help to lead the church (the Presiding Bishop for nine years, the Deputies president for three years) in developing policy, carrying out Convention's programs and strategies, and representing the Church to the world.

continued on page 2

Part of the job of a vestry member is to understand how the larger Church works. Here we explore the dynamics of General Convention — how it operates and what issues are forthcoming.

Challenges of the Windsor Report

by Leonard Freeman

In 2004, following the confirmation of the Rev. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire by the vote of the 2003 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Consultative Council issued "The Windsor Report" as a response of the rest of the Anglican Communion to the foment.

The report, so called because it was issued from Windsor Castle, was commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and chaired by the Archbishop of the Church in Ireland, Robin Eames...a man versed in traversing dangerous waters

through his twenty years of heading the Irish Church.

Gene Robinson's consecration, as an out-of-the-closet, non-celibate gay man living in a committed same-gender relationship, raised significant flags for parts of the rest of the Anglican Communion where different social, missional, and theological stances often prevail. In essence, many felt that the action had stretched the "bonds of affection," which traditionally have been cited as tying the

continued on page 4

*This Issue:
General Convention*



General Convention 101

continued from page 1

*Presiding Bishop Griswold has announced a new campaign, **Darkness into Day**, to restore and transform parishes on the Katrina-ravaged Gulf Coast. Coordinated by the Episcopal Church Foundation, the appeal is a joint effort with the Dioceses of Louisiana and Mississippi and will raise resources to renew and re-envision the Episcopal Church in the region.*

The House of Bishops will elect the next Presiding Bishop from among their members on June 18. The bishops will then ask the House of Deputies to agree to their choice. As of press time, the nominees were Neil Alexander of Atlanta; Edwin F. "Ted" Gulick, Jr. of Kentucky; Katharine Jefferts Schori of Nevada; Henry N. Parsley Jr. of Alabama; and by petition, Stacy F. Sauls of Lexington; Charles E. Jenkins III of Louisiana and Francisco Duque-Gomez of Columbia. The House of Deputies presidential candidates are not announced ahead of time.

- ✚ **Respond to the devastation of the Gulf Coast.** The issues include rebuilding destroyed church buildings and communities, possibly planting churches to minister to relocated people, paying salary and benefits to congregational and diocesan staff when income has been reduced or is nonexistent, and possibly making policy statements about states' and municipalities' rebuilding plans.
- ✚ **Approve an approximately \$151 million 2007-2009 budget.** The Executive Council, elected to oversee the ministry and mission of the Church between conventions, proposed the \$151,986,107 budget in January. It will be considered and, no doubt, tweaked by the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance (PB&F) before being presented to the Convention. The budget assumes increases in diocesan revenue commitments of 2.5 percent, three percent and three percent in the respective years. The final year of the current budget will see a two percent increase in diocesan income. The new budget assumes a five percent draw on endowment funds, one half percent less than that in the current triennium. The budget anticipates net rental income of \$2.2 million for space in the newly renovated Church Center in New York City and promises to reduce staff costs by \$825,000 through attrition and retirements.
- ✚ **Respond to criticism of the previous convention's decision** to give dioceses some choice in blessing same-gender relationships and to allow the Diocese of New Hampshire to choose an openly

gay man as its bishop. A fourteen-member special legislative committee has been named to deal with resolutions surrounding the Episcopal Church's response to a variety of official statements made by Anglican bodies including the Windsor Report (see box on page 3).

- ✚ **Vote to consent or not. The House of Bishops must act on the election of seven bishops** who were elected by their dioceses in the 120 days leading up to General Convention (consents for bishops elected outside this period are obtained via mail from all diocesan bishops and standing committees). It is possible that at least one of those consents will be for an openly gay bishop. At press time two of the five nominees for Bishop of California are gay people in committed relationships.
- ✚ **Revise canons and codes of conduct for ministry at all levels.** The Title III canons governing the ordination, life and work of priests and deacons were revised in 2003. Another round of revisions will be proposed in Columbus. A task force is proposing major revisions to Title IV ("Ecclesiastical Discipline") to include lay people and outline new disciplinary procedures. Its new name would be: "Fitness for Ministry, Accountability and Ecclesiastical Discipline." It defines a Minister as a baptized person or member of the clergy. It adds a category of "Minister in Leadership," defining such a person as a clergyperson, a person preparing for ordination or "any Minister other than a Member of the Clergy who has accepted a Ministry in this Church or in the Community." The proposal calls for new disciplinary procedures centered on diocesan courts to be known as the Discipline and Fitness for Ministry Board. The full text of the Title III and IV revisions can be read in the Blue Book (see box on page 3).

The Rev. Mary Frances Schjonberg is the national correspondent for the Episcopal News Service and the news director of the 75th General Convention. A non-stipendiary priest at Trinity Church in Asbury Park, New Jersey, she was formerly the assistant rector at Christ Church in Short Hills, New Jersey.

Resources for General Convention

Vestries, stay in the General Convention loop by making use of the following resources:

BEFORE:

Download news and information on Convention for your weekly parish bulletin from the Episcopal News Service (ENS). Inserts available from the "News Nexus" section at www.episcopalchurch.org/ens or call 800-334-7626.

Receive regular e-mail from the Episcopal News Service by subscribing through news@episcopalchurch.org

Order other publications (the Blue Book, handbooks, etc.) through the General Convention website/publications link at www.episcopalchurch.org

DURING:

Each night, download the official newspaper of General Convention, "Convention Daily," through www.episcopalchurch.org/ens

Other Convention coverage may also be found at: www.episcopalchurch.org/ens

OTHER:

The Windsor Report: www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/index.cfm

The Episcopal Church's initial response to the Windsor Report, "To Set our Hope on Christ," through the General Convention website/publications link at www.episcopalchurch.org



Each diocese elects up to eight delegates to General Convention, four clergy and four lay. Book one or two now to share their thoughts with your congregation before and after Convention.

Ed's note: As General Convention approaches, there is much exploration of the Church's relationship to the Anglican Communion. We asked Maurice Seaton from the Episcopal Church Foundation to share grassroots ways in which Episcopal congregations are forging relationships with Anglicans around the world.

Global Mission Grows Churches

by Maurice Seaton

Churches that have made the decision to grow must be outward-looking. Overseas relationships stretch us to encounter the unfamiliar and are an important part of church growth. The potential benefits and unanticipated spiritual rewards are limitless. We are called to live into Jesus' words to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31) — yet we are often slow to reach out to Christians elsewhere in the world.

By sharing in the lives and ministries of others, we see God at work in new ways. Global mission is relationship-centered and results in renewed faith, stronger communities and a unified church. To make a difference in a world rife with need, we need each other. Consider these steps when establishing connections:

✦ Prayerfully discern how and where God is calling you to be involved in overseas mission;

- ✦ Approach contacts who can introduce you to an appropriate companion relationship;
- ✦ Together develop shared expectations, projects and creative encounters;
- ✦ Involve and educate church members about the program and develop a long-term relationship.

Who is my neighbor, anyway?

The Episcopal Church of St. John the Divine in Houston (Diocese of Texas) is a large, urban, family-oriented church of 4,000 members. The World Mission Committee at St. John's coordinates work into four thriving mission programs with an annual budget of \$75,000:

- ✦ The Haiti Education Foundation;
- ✦ The Amistad Mission and Retreat Center, Bolivia;
- ✦ The Mendies Haven, Nepal;
- ✦ The Mission Russia Program.

continued on page 5

Challenges of Windsor

continued from page 1

twenty-five independent provinces together to a possible breaking point.

The report, to which the 2006 General Convention will now respond, was drafted as the initial step on a way forward for keeping the Communion together and for finding new ways to work through issues of significant difference.

Recommendations

In addition to asking the Episcopal Church (USA) to say a clear Yes to its desire to remain in the Anglican Communion by expressing “its regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached in the events surrounding the [Robinson] election and consecration,” the sixty-page report called for moratoriums on three kinds of action, and the development of a new **Anglican Covenant** as steps toward a new way of working together.

Moratoriums were recommended for:

- 1) “The election and consent to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate [office of bishop] who is living in a same-gender union until some new consensus in the Anglican Communion emerges.”
- 2) The authorization of public rites of blessing for same-sex unions, while the Communion engages in “continuing study of biblical and theological rationale for and against such unions.”
- 3) Bishops from other dioceses or provinces intervening in provinces, dioceses and parishes other than their own. (Some African and American bishops have felt called to intervene in other American dioceses and churches out of concern for what have been termed “traditionalist congregations.”)

Responses

In March 2005, the American House of Bishops formally responded to the Windsor Report by expressing its own “deep regret for the pain that others have experienced” re: the 2003 General Convention actions, and offering “our sincerest apology and repentance for having breached our bonds of affection by any failure to consult adequately.”

The bishops also took the further step of pledging to withhold consent to the consecration of any person elected bishop until General Convention 2006, and further, to not authorize any public rites for the

blessing of same-sex unions, at least until this upcoming General Convention. And in June 2005 a delegation of lay and clergy made presentations to the Anglican Consultative Council in Nottingham, England, re: their understanding of theological and pastoral issues before the American Church.

An Anglican Covenant

The sleeper element of Windsor could be the call for an Anglican Covenant. Political autonomy has been the primary model for the member churches of the Anglican Communion to this point (i.e., the vote to have women priests in the U.S. did not require the consent or agreement of any larger body). Windsor could chart new territory, with its call for consideration of a new covenant to make “explicit and forceful” how the different churches would relate to one another on matters such as the parameters of autonomy and the management of disputes.

“There were too many assumptions made... before all of this boiled up,” said Eames, “too many bland statements...too many bonds of affection which weren’t worked out in terms of concrete relationships.”

Broadening the discourse

While response to the Windsor Report could appear to present the 75th General Convention with the specter of an up/down ultimatum kind of vote, Episcopal Divinity School professor Ian Douglas, co-chair of a special commission to receive the report, does not think so. “Part of the commission’s work is to broaden the discussion so that deputies and bishops can have a discussion informed by wisdom, and not just have to be reactive — either positively or negatively.”

“Our charge is to clarify for the 75th General Convention the documents that have become a part of the discourse...to look at this material and try to help the General Convention live into the fullest level of communion possible with our brothers and sisters throughout the Anglican Communion.”

Leonard Freeman, rector of St. Martin’s by-the-Lake, Minnetonka Beach, Minnesota, served on the communications staff of six General Conventions and the 1988 Lambeth Conference.



There are nearly 70 million members of the Anglican Communion — made up of 500 dioceses, 30,000 parishes and 64,000 individual congregations in a total of 164 countries. The U.S. Episcopal Church has approximately 2.3 million members.

*Next Issue:
Parish
Communications*

Mission Grows Churches

continued from page 3

Bob Stinson, a lay member and head of the World Mission Committee, says that the call to global mission grew from prayerful discernment and a need to “organize people’s response to God’s call.” St. John’s raised \$20,000 in two days to assist the Diocese of Peshawar, Pakistan, to buy tents and equipment after the 2005 earthquake.

Companion relationships have expanded since Stinson’s first trip to Bolivia some ten years ago. Based on a personal connection by a parishioner, several went to Bolivia and were overwhelmed by the strong faith of the people they met. At the end of the visit, he realized that those he encountered had motivated him to get involved and give something back. By 2005 the number of parishioners who went on mission trips increased to forty and the goal for 2006 is seventy. Stinson has seen “how much God is working in the world, in places people do not know exist.” He is humbled to be a part of meeting needs in places where people have few resources.

Involvement has deepened prayer life at St. John’s. “People have a real connection with the places and people we pray for and know personally,” says Stinson. “We have learned how extensively the Anglican Communion has permeated around the world.” In the future, St. John’s plans to increase mission trips and support parishioners considering becoming full-time missionaries.

Strengthening the connection

Parishioners at St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, Oakland/Franklin Lakes, (Diocese of Newark) are also excited. A new phase has begun in their relationship with the rural community of Kothapallimitta (village on a hill) in South India. To bridge the distance, the churches are conducting Bible study by video exchange. Each congregation is studying the same biblical passages and videotaping the discussions. After translation the tapes will be exchanged. There is anticipation as each community awaits its companion’s tape. A novel way a congregation with limited resources can deepen a relationship.

The Rev. Prince Singh is rector at St. Alban’s and was ordained in South India where eighty percent of Christians are Dalits (untouchables). He helped establish the relationship with Kothapallimitta three years ago. St. Alban’s is a suburban, middle class congregation in New Jersey with about one-

hundred people in church on Sunday, including a growing number of young families. Together with a neighboring Episcopal church, they are funding the construction of a school for 300 children in Kothapallimitta. Part of the \$200,000 project is complete and one-hundred children already attend school.

Prince Singh emphasizes that the relationship is “a long-term commitment to learning and building, based on equal respect between two different communities.” People at St. Alban’s were shocked to realize the depths of poverty in India. “Life happens even when people have absolutely nothing,” says Singh.

Erika Murphy, a seminarian, is excited about going to India this summer. “It’s humbling to work with issues of poverty and injustice in Kothapallimitta. There are many ways to help, but getting personally involved is the most meaningful. I plan to bring the experience back and share it with St. Alban’s.”

For the full text of this article, plus related information on organizations working with congregations overseas, go to the *Vestry Papers* link at www.EpiscopalFoundation.org



The Global Anglicanism Project (GAP) is a resource for Episcopal congregations seeking to understand the Anglican Communion. GAP’s most recent report, “The Vitality and Promise of Being Anglican,” is available for adult education groups. The report narrates stories of the life and ministry of Anglicans in Brazil, North India, New Zealand and Tanzania. Copies are available at www.EpiscopalFoundation.org or call 800-697-2858.

Maurice Seaton is the associate director of Learning and Leadership at the Episcopal Church Foundation where he is primarily responsible for the Global Anglicanism Project. He is a lifelong Anglican, born and raised in South Africa.



May and June are significant months for planning parish activities.

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Editor's Note

Some have expressed concern that this might be a contentious General Convention. On the other hand, the heads of both houses, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, and President of the House of Deputies George Werner, have been working actively to enable real conversation. Dean Werner made sixty-two flights between August and March alone — talking with clergy, dioceses, parishes and interest groups — to broaden conversation and to build community. “General Convention is a community in a time when community can be a foreign language.” It is an encouraging approach.

Lindsay Hardin Freeman

Some Springtime Reading...

Vestry Papers is delighted to announce the publication of **Doing Holy Business: The Best of Vestry Papers**. Filled with both practical tips and theological wisdom, the book is a compilation of fifty articles from *Vestry Papers*, with topics ranging from Christian formation to stewardship to church growth.

Church Publishing is offering a 25 percent discount to *Vestry Papers* readers. To order your copy for \$12.00, note the promotion code “SALEVP” upon ordering. The code, which will expire on December 31, 2006, will be accepted on all telephone orders (800-242-1918) or on the web (www.churchpublishing.org). Customers will need to enter the code at checkout.

