

**REPORT FROM THE DEPUTATION TO THE 80TH GENERAL CONVENTION OF
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Jamie McMahon, Deputation Chair**

The General Convention is the governing body of The Episcopal Church and meets every three years. Its legislative process is an expression of The Episcopal Church's belief that, under God, the Church is ordered and governed by its people: laity, deacons, priests, and bishops.

Convention was supposed to meet in 2021 but was postponed until 2022 due to the pandemic, and dioceses were asked to bring fewer alternates to decrease the number of attendees overall. Pittsburgh was represented by: Mr. Jamie McMahon (deputation chair), The Rev. Canon Eric McIntosh, The Rev. Jeff Murph, The Rev. Kris Opat, The Rev. Neil Raman, the Rev. Nancy Threadgill (clergy alternate), Mr. Jon Delano, Mr. Michael Braxton, Ms. Lisa Brown, and Dr. Joan Gundersen (lay alternate). Of course, our bishop the Rt. Rev. Dr. Ketlen Solak also attended.

The General Convention is our Church's highest temporal authority. As such, it has the power to amend the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, to amend the Book of Common Prayer and to authorize other liturgical texts, to adopt the budget for the Church, to create covenants and official relationships with other branches of the Church, to determine requirements for its clergy and other leaders, to approve resolutions on public policy, and to carry out other responsibilities and authority.

There are two legislative Houses of General Convention: the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. Each of the two Houses has a presiding officer: the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies. The House of Deputies is composed of deputations elected from each diocese of The Episcopal Church (including dioceses in Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, and the Virgin Islands); from Navajoland; from the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe; and from Liberia (which has seat and voice). Members of the Official Youth Presence also have seat and voice, and the House of Deputies overall includes over 850 people. The House of Bishops is composed of every bishop diocesan, suffragan, and assistant, as well as retired bishops and those who are serving the church in a different capacity, although this number was somewhat limited this year due to the pandemic.

Our ecclesiology teaches our belief that the Holy Spirit works through the actions of General Convention to express God's will for our church. A resolution becomes an Act of Convention only after both Houses adopt it in the same form and at the same General Convention. The gathering is usually about two weeks long but as part of the COVID-19 precautions it was shortened to just four legislative days. During that time, over 400 resolutions were considered during about 25 hours of legislative meetings. The schedule started with daily worship at 8:30am and usually did not conclude until after 9:30pm each evening. In addition, Legislative Committees met virtually to discuss legislation and hold public hearings in advance of convention, which was a new part of the process. Several members of Pittsburgh's deputation

served on a committee and therefore the work of convention stretched out over a much longer time than usual.

The convention adopted a balanced \$100.5 million churchwide two-year budget for 2023-2024. Much of the new spending in the budget is tied to resolutions proposed by the Presiding Officers' Working Group on Truth-Telling, Reckoning and Healing. Central among them is Resolution A125, for which the budget includes \$400,000 in start-up funds for a new Episcopal Coalition for Racial Equity and Justice. The budget plan also includes spending \$225,000 on research to confront The Episcopal Church's historic ties to the federal system of Indigenous boarding schools, as outlined in Resolution A127. The testimony about these two resolutions by both bishops and deputies was compelling and deeply moving.

Convention approved the first reading of a constitutional change to define the Book of Common Prayer. Resolution A059 calls for amending Article X of the Constitution of The Episcopal Church, which lays out how the Book of Common Prayer can be revised but has never specifically provided for authorized liturgies that are not proposed revisions to the existing book. If the change passes a second reading at the 81st General Convention in 2024, Article X would, for the first time, define the Book of Common Prayer as "those liturgical forms and other texts authorized by the General Convention." In other words, liturgies that are not in the current prayer book – such as same-sex marriage rites and gender-expansive liturgies – could be elevated to "prayer book status," whether they are replacing parts of the prayer book or standing on their own. Members of the diocese will be asked to express their thoughts about this proposal prior to 2024, and it will be presented to diocesan convention.

Two women will lead the House of Deputies for the first time in history. Oklahoma lay Deputy Julie Ayala Harris, elected July 9 on the third ballot, succeeds the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, who finished her third and canonically required final term at the end of convention. Ayala Harris is the first Latina and the youngest person elected to lead the house. Deputies elected the Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton as vice president the following day. Taber-Hamilton, who is Shackan First Nation, is the first Indigenous and first ordained woman to serve as vice president. Ayala Harris and Taber-Hamilton are the first people of color serving together as leaders of the House of Deputies.

Resolution D050 reunified the Fort Worth-based Diocese of North Texas with the Diocese of Texas. The North Texas diocese, with 14 congregations and fewer than 4,000 members, was greatly diminished in membership by a 2008 schism, in which a majority of clergy and lay leaders in the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth voted to leave The Episcopal Church over disagreements about the ordination of women and LGBTQ+ people. The merger followed a process known as reunion since both dioceses have roots in the historic Diocese of Texas. Convention's vote follows actions in June by the diocesan conventions of each of the two dioceses to approve the merger.

Convention adopted resolutions to offer paid family leave and health insurance to lay and clergy church employees through the Denominational Health Plan. Resolution A003 urges but does not

require, dioceses to adopt uniform paid family leave policies for all employees. Resolution D034 created a new task force to provide advice about the Denominational Health Plan, which is provided through Church Pension Group and which churches and dioceses are required to provide to clergy and some lay employees. The task force will provide the 81st General Convention in 2024 with options to reduce health insurance costs across The Episcopal Church.

These are just a few of the many actions taken by the 80th General Convention. A complete summary can be found here:

<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/31909>

Overall, Pittsburgh's deputies came away from convention both tired from the pace of work but energized by how much was able to be accomplished in such a short amount of time. We spoke at length during a recent meeting about how each of us was personally impacted by many of the actions discussed in this brief report and our excitement at where The Episcopal Church is going. The General Convention next meets in 2024 in Louisville, KY, during which the House of Bishops will elect the next Presiding Bishop and the House of Deputies will confirm the election. Deputies from Pittsburgh will be elected at diocesan convention in November.

-- Jamie McMahon, Deputation Chair