

## **Bishop's Message: E-News July 13, 2015**

### **Re: General Convention**

Aloha,

Bea and I returned from Salt Lake City late last Saturday afternoon. Having spent too many days caught up in the meetings, resolutions, voting and swirl of General Convention, I am most happy to be home.

I write to offer some initial thoughts about the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church and what the actions of that General Convention might mean for the Diocese of Hawai'i. These are just first thoughts as I return home, and the full impact and meaning will have to emerge over time. According to the General Convention Office, the final text of the resolutions will be available within thirty days.

The House of Bishops elected the Right Reverend Michael Curry to be the 27<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop on the first ballot. Keep in mind that Michael received 121 of the 174 votes. The remaining 53 votes were divided among the three other candidates. The Holy Spirit moved in the Episcopal Church through this election. In the House of Bishops, each Bishop is assigned to a table for three years (from immediately following General Convention through the meeting at the next General Convention). I have sat at the same table with Michael for the past three years. He is a person of deep faith in Jesus Christ with energy and joy. Please take a look at his sermon preached at the closing General Convention Eucharist (at <https://episcopalchurch.wistia.com/medias/q8mmopf6zu>) and an 18-minute interview (at <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2015/06/30/video-interview-with-presiding-bishop-elect-michael-curry/>) to get a sense of his passion, personality and vision for our Church.

This General Convention made mandatory the current voluntary diocesan budgetary asking system for the 2019-2021 budget cycle and imposed penalties for noncompliance. As a Diocese that has historically paid the full asking, this comes as welcome news and making things right throughout the Church. Currently, less than half of the Dioceses of the Episcopal Church pay the full asking. The rates of the new mandatory diocesan assessment have been set at 18% in 2016, 16.5% in 2017 and 15% in 2018. More importantly, the General Convention adopted the 2016-2018 triennial budget July 2 after

agreeing to add \$2.8 million for evangelism work. For the Diocese and our congregations, we will need to seriously consider how we can best access these funds for grants and other initiatives for congregational development and new congregations. The Presiding Bishop-Elect has challenged the Church to make evangelism a priority in the years ahead.

As a Church, we collectively moved to marriage equality just as the Supreme Court ruled legalizing same-sex marriage in the United States. Two new liturgies, “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” and “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2” from “Liturgical Resources 1: I Will Bless You and You Will be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015” from the supplemental Blue Book materials of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, are authorized for use beginning this Advent. Those rites offer the option of using “wife,” “husband,” “person” or “spouse,” thus making them applicable for all couples. Canons were changed to allow for marriage equality, and Resolution A054 stipulates: “Bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority or, where appropriate, ecclesiastical supervision, will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this church to have access to these liturgies.” While individual clergy retain the canonical right to refuse to officiate at any wedding, bishops, even in Dioceses that have not approved same-sex marriage, must provide for pastoral care and response for all couples. In practical terms, this will have little impact on the Diocese of Hawai‘i other than a refinement of the marriage rites provided for couples seeking to be married in the Church. As Episcopalians, it affirms our commitment to strive to be inclusive and to honor diversity of theological opinion.

If there is anything that Episcopalians can get worked up about, it is liturgy and music. General Convention decided to begin studying how we might begin the process of the revisions of both the Book of Common Prayer and the Hymnal. In addition, the whole issue of commemoration of individuals in the Church’s calendar. *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* is still the “official” authorized supplemental calendar of commemorations. A new volume *Great Cloud of Witnesses* supersedes *Holy Women, Holy Men*, but only as a resource. This will hopefully lead to a revised authorized supplemental calendar of commemorations based on the following: 1. Historicity: Christianity is a radically historical religion, so in almost every instance it is not theological realities or spiritual movements, but exemplary witness to the Gospel of Christ in lives actually lived that is remembered in our family story; 2.

Christian Discipleship: The family story captured here is uniquely and identifiably a Christian story. This set of stories commemorates the ways particular Christians live out the promises of baptism; 3. Significance: Those remembered should have been in their lifetime extraordinary, even heroic servants of God and God's people for the sake, and after the example, of Jesus Christ; 4. Range of Inclusion: Particular attention should be paid to Episcopalians and other members of the Anglican Communion. Attention should also be paid to the inclusion of people of different genders and races, of lay people (witnessing in this way to our baptismal understanding of the Church), and of ecumenical partners and people who have had their own distinctive influence upon us. In addition to the better-known, it is important also to include those "whose memory may have faded in the shifting fashions of public concern, but whose witness is deemed important to the life and mission of the Church" (Thomas Talley); 5. Local Observance: Normally, significant remembrance of a particular person already exists within the Church at the local and regional levels before that person is included in the Church's larger story; 6. Perspective: The introduction of new names should be done with a certain economy lest the balance of the whole be overwhelmed. In the cases of those departed less than forty years ago — particularly in the case of controversial names — care should be given to seeing them from the perspective of history. Names added should show a broad influence upon the Church and should result from a widespread desire expressed across the Church over a reasonable period of time; 7. Combined Remembrances: Not all those included need to be remembered "in isolation." Where there are close and natural links between persons to be remembered, a joint commemoration would make excellent sense (e.g., the Reformation martyrs, Latimer and Ridley; and two bishops of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste and Hugh).

For the Diocese of Hawai'i, there are two important implications: 1. Our own Queen Lili'uokalani's commemoration will move forward to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music as they look to future revisions of the Church's calendar; 2. I think it important that we consider local commemorations in light of the criteria noted above. While it certainly should include the Ali'i who were important in our diocesan history, it might also include other significant figures like the Sisters of the Society of the Holy Trinity or Father Kenneth Bray.

The House of Bishops rejected a call for an official, General Convention sanctioned conversation about making Communion of the unbaptized [also called (inappropriately, I think) "Open Table"] officially part of our Church's life. As many of you know, I cannot support the call for any change in the canon that states: "No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion" (Canon I.17.7). As I have in the past, I commend to you: "The Huron Statement: Font to Table" (2012) of Associated Parishes [http://www.associatedparishes.org/images/The\\_Huron\\_Statement.pdf](http://www.associatedparishes.org/images/The_Huron_Statement.pdf) and the *Anglican Theological Review* article "Following Jesus Outside: Reflections on the Open Table" by Thomas E. Breidenthal <http://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/static/pdf/articles/breidenthal.pdf>. Personally, I did agree to be part of unofficial conversations at the regional level (perhaps focused at seminaries) about the issue.

General Convention also adopted a revision of the Church's recommended "Alcohol Policy." Further, there is now the expectation that ordinands be questioned at the very beginning of the discernment process about addiction and substance abuse in their lives and family systems. General Convention acknowledged the Episcopal Church's role in the culture of alcohol and drug abuse. As a Diocese, I have asked the Standing Committee to review the resolutions and make significant recommendations regarding our policies as a Diocese and for our congregations.

Interestingly, while General Convention acted to direct the Investment Committee of Executive Council, the Episcopal Church Endowment Fund and the Episcopal Church Foundation "to divest from fossil fuel companies and reinvest in clean renewable energy in a fiscally responsible manner", the House of Bishops rejected even the hint of divestment from companies and corporations engaged in certain business activities related to the State of Israel. The Investment Committee of Executive Council and the Church Pension urged both Houses of General Convention to reject divestment of any type. It was argued that the Church Pension Fund is a corporate entity under New York law and that the Board of the Fund fiduciary responsibility is separate from the Church. That argument regarding the Pension Fund held sway for divestment from fossil fuel companies, but other investments of the Church are subject to divestment. This will be an issue Diocesan Council will need to discuss.

The discussion about Palestine and Israel was very different. There was only limited support of Resolution D016 (Being Socially Responsible Investors In Palestine and Israel) that directed “.... the Executive Council Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to develop a list of U.S. and foreign corporations that provide goods and services that support the infrastructure of Israel’s Occupation for their Fall 2016 meeting to be reported to the Church and to maintain and update such a list annually.” The resolution didn’t use the word “divestment” and it did not call for any type of boycott, divestment, or sanction, but some bishops expressed deep concern that it was heading in that direction. I think many bishops were persuaded by the argument that Archbishop Suheil Dawani of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem has repeatedly urged the Episcopal Church to not adopt a policy that would make it more difficult for him to manage his congregations and the more than 30 social service institutions. In the end, the voice vote was a clear “no.” I admit mine was a half-hearted “ugh” during the voice vote at the time of the call for all those in favor. Why? I was trying to read the resolution as amended in committee and understand what it was actually calling for. Of all things that come before General Convention, I am not that well versed on how the Church can best address the Palestine-Israel conflict. I read what those in our Diocese send me and I read what comes from the Episcopal Church (and from the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem). The dominant voices on the floor of the House of Bishops -- including bishops I respect -- seemed to be speaking to something that wasn’t quite in the resolution and I was trying to understand what I was missing. There was deep concern about what Archbishop Suheil Dawani and the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem wanted us to do. I knew some of the bishops speaking against the resolution were in regular personal contact with the Archbishop. The General Convention committed \$675,000 “to identify and find creative ways to commend, support, and elevate the work of local peace-building and economic development initiatives, including those of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East and grassroots organizations jointly led by Israelis and Palestinians.” I think it important for the Diocese of Hawai’i to continue to show our support for the Diocese of Jerusalem through The American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (AFEDJ). I suspect that the conversation will continue in our Diocese. I will continue to listen and try to better understand. I count on members of the Diocese with greater knowledge and experience to continue to offer information and insights.

During General Convention I was assigned to the World Mission Committee

(as Co-Secretary); we worked on several resolutions. I was especially engaged with one on support for Christians in Pakistan and the call for a day of prayer for persecuted Christians. I was particularly taken by the needs of the Church in Pakistan (through Bishop Samuel Azariah, moderator of the Church of Pakistan, noted in the article at <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2015/07/06/persecuted-christians-need-greater-solidarity-and-support-convention-urges/>) that needs our support.

All in all, of the five General Conventions I have attended as a Deputy or Bishop, this was the most positive and well organized (the shift from paper to iPads/online organization went very well). I sensed a new sense of direction and shared identity as we move into the next phase of our life together.

Please know that I welcome your questions and concerns. We will be hearing from our Deputies over the next few weeks. We will also be in conversation about how the actions of GC 2015 impact us in the Diocese of Hawai'i.

Thank you for your prayers over the past few weeks.

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko mākou Haku,

+Bob