

General Convention, 2012
July 13, 2012
The Rt Rev'd John Bauerschmidt

Second and Final Report from General Convention

The 2012 General Convention has now concluded, though it will take some time to discover and digest exactly what was done. In the legislative process that dominates the Convention, matters that come before the House of Bishops may not ever make it to the House of Deputies for action, and vice versa, so it will take a little while for me to come to grips with all that has been done. A large part of the Convention's time deals with resolutions that will never be reported in the press, and their import sometimes takes a while to become clear.

But we can lay down in some broad brush strokes the actions of this Convention. The Convention created a process for structural reform in The Episcopal Church, which is a most significant step forward. Significantly, this process goes outside our normal channels to address the subject of change, rather than relying on present structures to change themselves. Recommendations for change and resolutions to accomplish it will appear before the 2015 Convention for action, and we will have a chance in our own diocese to participate in this process through prayer and consultation. We will see what the details of reform are as they emerge.

The Convention also amended a resolution that would have opened the door a tiny crack to the practice of "Open Table", the communion of un-baptized people, effectively defeating the proposal. This amendment was adopted unanimously by the House of Bishops, indicating an overwhelming sentiment against change in the historic theology and practice of the Church in regard to Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. The Convention declined to take action on the proposed Anglican Covenant, rather than rejecting it, acknowledging the diversity of understandings of our polity and ecclesiology within this church. It also affirmed a resolution indicating our desire to remain as a constituent member church of the Anglican Communion.

In its most controversial action, the Convention authorized a liturgy for the blessing of same-sex relationships, permitted for use where authorized by the bishop and where acceptable to priest and congregation. There are substantial safeguards for clergy and churches that do not wish to make this rite available for use. The accompanying theological rationale for the practice is couched in the language of pastoral care rather than the language of justice and sexual right.

I know these actions will be a source of joy for some and of grief for others. I hope you will not be surprised that I argued against authorization of this rite, and I refer you to my brief remarks from the floor of the House of Bishops posted elsewhere for my theological reasoning. Along with some others I have signed a statement of dissent. I have no plans to authorize use of these liturgical rites in our diocese, which I know is a source of sadness to a number of our members. I know that in difficult times in our church I do not bear the most heavy load. I also know that this conversation will continue in The Episcopal Church, in our diocese, and most significantly in the society in which we live. It is most important that we remain together and not retreat into our separate corners as in times past. I am encouraged to think that we will not do so.

I am again grateful for our deputation from the Diocese of Tennessee for their ministry and care as a deputies. We were well served. I thank you for your prayers and your encouragement during this General Convention, and look forward to a quick return to Tennessee.